

THE PRACTICAL MATTERS

WHY CHRISTIANITY ISN'T TRUE



PAUL MAXWELL

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Dedicated to Jimmy.

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Potter's Field

Imagine that, one beautiful night, when the stars are very clear in the sky, you dream a dream. This dream exists within a dream world. This dream world is identical to your real life. One day, in your dream world, you are in a coffee shop. On the TV behind the counter, a news anchor appears and announces something truly unbelievable.

“Aliens have arrived.”

They play the live footage. You see some enormous object has landed in the middle of a field. *This has to be a fucking joke*, you think.

You turn to look at others around you, and people are genuinely terrified. You realize:

They believe it. Could this be ... real? You were supposed to meet Karissa at the coffee shop 30 minutes ago. It isn't normal for her to be late without notice.

Bzzzzzt! Bzzzzzt! Bzzzzzt!

— Karissa Jones —

— Calling —

You can tell from her panting that Karissa is running: “I’m at the site! I’m here! I can see it with my eyes! Oh my God! You have to come here. Oh my God. Oh my God. Please, you have to—” *chhhhhhhhhhhhh* You are only 20 miles from this site.

You look up from your phone to see others in the coffee shop debating what they see on TV. One of the baristas catches

your attention as she answers her phone: “You’re *there*?

What? Oh my God, honey! No! Babe! Babe?

Babe! ...”

Other people are getting similar phone calls. This is real. You sense a tingling in your stomach. It turns into a hollow sense of sickness. A nausea. You immediately have to use the restroom. You jump from your seat, burst through the restroom doors, and slam the stall shut.

What the fuck is happening? you think. The nausea turns into a tightness in your stomach. And then, your chest. You begin to hyper-ventilate. *What’s happening? What’s happening? What’s happening?* You cry hysterically on the stall floor.

Then, you have a moment of collection.

The stress of this initial shock has worked its way through your body. *Okay*, you think. *Time to go*. You grab your keys, swipe your laptop on the way out of the shop, and get in your car. You know exactly the place they showed on TV. You text your friend: “Be there in 20,” not knowing if she’s even alive.

You jump on the highway and race to the field. You force yourself not to think, just to keep yourself from freaking out. *I just have to get there. I just have to get there*. You pull onto the field and ... there it is. A giant stone pyramid of some kind, like a four-way staircase in which all stairs lead to a single square platform on top. It’s surrounded by a frantic crowd, but you shove your way to the front.

“KARISSA?” You shout for your friend.

Just as you finish shouting, a man arises out of that square platform on top of the pyramid. You are maybe 50 feet away. He somehow speaks calmly, but with a megaphone-level voice.

“Silence.”

The thousands gathered fall silent.

“You.”

He points directly at you.

“Come to me.”

Ummmmmmmm What? you think.

Impatient with your hesitance, he says:

“Come to me or I will compel the crowds to bring you to me.”

You feel the nausea coming back. The nausea begins to turn into panic again. The next 5 seconds feel like they are going in slow-motion. You think back to your mother. Your father. Your birth. Your childhood. Every good thing that you had pushed down just to survive life. All the things you had hoped you would do before you died. It all passes before you.

Then, you feel your panic curdle into helplessness inside your stomach. The helplessness calcifies into an anger. You look up at the man with a flame in your eye. You feel defensive of your own life. You remember that

you are an autonomous human being. You have rights. You have freedoms.

But it doesn't matter. You're speaking to someone who has no concept of human rights. You're surrounded by a crowd that will happily sacrifice your human rights for theirs.

You have no choice. And yet, you make it a choice. *I'm going to count to 5, you tell yourself, and I'll go to him.*

5 ... 4 ... 3 ... 2 ... — "BRING HIM TO ME!" He screeches from the top of the pyramid.

A burly man from the crowd steps forward.

He grabs your collar from behind. You feel his calloused sausage fingers hold your neck and toss you like a stick. No use resisting. He's too big. He thrusts you forward. You fall into the muddy field, and it covers you in grime.

You pick yourself up and begin to walk toward this figure. You arrive at the pyramid, where you face one of the four staircases that leads to the top. You look up at him. He

stands perfectly straight. Perfectly serious. It's clear that he wields some kind of unearthly strength.

"Come," he whispers.

You put your left foot on the first step of the staircase. Nothing happens. You pause.

"Come!" he insists.

"Okay, I'm coming," are your first words to him.

You put your right foot on the second step.

And your left on the third. And your right on the fourth. As you ascend, you see that he becomes calmer. You are too scared to turn your head, because you're afraid you will

incite the figure's anger. You glance through your peripheral vision to see that the whole crowd is staring at you. They want to know: "What will happen? What *is* happening?"

You arrive at the top. You stand face-to-face with this figure. He is exactly your height. He is exactly your build. He speaks.

You realize that, up-close, his voice is exactly the same as your voice.

"I am Marduk, the ancient God who ruled what your historians call 'Babylon.' I am here to reclaim this place."

What the fuuuuuuuuuuuuuck? is on repeat in your head, but you stay silent.

Finally, you muster the courage to speak:

"What do you want with *me*?"

His face is draped in some kind of fine metal mesh that behaves like a liquid. You can't see him clearly, but you can make out his basic facial expressions beneath the mesh. You can smell something foul in his breath. You can see his pupils are shaped like vertical splinters tacked to his eyes.

"I designate you my new Emissary in this place," Marduk says matter-of-factly.

"Why me?"

"HA! BRAW-Haw-hoo," Marduk doubles over in laughter. "Good one, Emissary. A human asking 'Why?' I haven't heard that one before."

"But I am asking."

“Because you are my Emissary, I will explain it to you. Only gods can ask ‘Why?’ For only gods have the ability to create purpose.

The question presumes an understanding of an intention which human beings by nature cannot have, and therefore cannot conceivably classify. You will never understand an answer to the question ‘Why?’ And, if you do, the answer is a lie.”

“Well, the truth is ... I don’t really care why.

I just want you to let me go,” you explain straightforwardly, sounding a bit like Marduk himself.

“So, the God of this world visits you, and selects you to be his Emissary, and the first thing you ask is a question you didn’t even really care to ask?”

Suddenly, you feel brave enough to look behind you. The crowd looks up at you. A faint voice from the crowd yells: “WHAT’S HE SAYING?” The question echoes throughout the field. You’re not a religious person, but you begin to pray in your mind: *Dear God ... please save me. Please save me. Please help me.*

Please let this all be a dream. Please, God let this all be a dream.”

Marduk whips his head at you. You feel the pyramid begin to tremble. His eyes start to glow. You hear the sound of a giant waterfall.

Deep. Rumbling. It’s coming from inside his chest. He opens his mouth and fire consumes you. Before you feel any burning sensation ...

You wake up.

You blink your eyes.

Where am I? Oh ... I'm home.

Your hands are gripping your sheets. But ...

they are your normal sheets. Your normal bed.

You relax your grip. You glance at your TV and see the same news anchor who announced the arrival of Marduk in your dream. He's re-reporting on traffic jams on the 5. You let out a big sigh.

Ugggggghhhh.

You fall back into your pillow. It felt *so real*.

It was the most real dream you had ever dreamt in your life. It almost ... felt more real than real life. You pick up your phone. There's

a text from Karissa: "Hey, shithead. Still on for coffee at 9a?"

But there is one thought that lingers with you. What is it like to stand before a god? A being who does not believe he must respect any human's life, laws, or dignity? A being who can command the power of the whole human race, not with any power in particular, but *through fear* by a show of power. And, you think:

Would any of those Bronze Age gods ever really be worthy of the worship of humanity at its best?

"No," you say out loud to yourself — the first words you speak in the day. "No. I wouldn't worship him. Even if he killed me.

Even if the crowds killed me. I would never worship Marduk.”

You get out of bed. You brush your teeth, take a shower, and drive to coffee to meet

Karissa. While sitting over coffee, her eyes linger toward the floor as if there’s something she wants to say.

“What’s up? You okay?” you ask her.

“Yeah,” she says. “I uh ... well, my pastor is doing this challenge thing, and he challenged us all to invite one friend to church this Sunday. And, I was hoping you might come with me to church to see what it’s all about.”

Obviously, you want to say “No.” But you want to be a good friend. You glance at the floor with a nervous smile. In looking away, your eyes catch the restroom door. The whole dream comes flooding back. The smell of Marduk’s hot breath on your face. The clink of his chainmail. His lizard eyes. His pale face.

His coldness. His disrespect for human life.

His disbelief in human rights. The fear. The panic. The sadness. The helplessness. Your first words to Marduk: “Okay, I’m coming.” And

then, your first words to yourself as a free person this morning: “No. I would never worship Marduk.”

You look at Karissa. You feel the nausea in your stomach again. You feel the panic rising.

All the same as the dream. What will you say?

“Well? Don’t make me beg. You’re making me feel stupid for asking. Are you coming this Sunday or not?”

And, as if you didn’t even intend to say it, you sigh: “Okay, I’m coming.”

The Ego and Belief

I will list below several claims that are core to Christian belief. No matter where you find them, Christians believe these things without exception. If they tell you, “I’m not that kind of Christian,” they are evading confrontation with you. They are lying to you. But it is not a bald lie. They are actually lying to themselves.

You are more than your ego, but your ego is not less than you.

Many Christians are confused about who they can really be. They are even more confused about what truth can really be. They are helpless children caught between the self and the truth, tossing the ball of attention back and forth until the Christian is dizzy with confusion. Kierkegaard worshipped this dizziness.

It’s sick that he did so, and his fetish with sickness was itself a more serious sickness than he ever would have dared to articulate.

A belief in the fundamental claims of Christianity cannot co-exist with a completely sane mind. Is anyone completely sane? Hell no. Obviously. But believing in Christianity guarantees a level of mental unwellness. A sickness of the self — not the fetishized sickness, but a true, nauseating toxicity that hurts

many people and causes those people to hurt many others. Christianity is a virus in the self.

The self is much greater than the “I.” The “I” and the ego are the same. In Greek, the word for “I” is *ego*.¹

¹ Some Christian somewhere will say, “That’s the etymological fallacy!” First, you do this shit all the time. Second, The etymological fallacy isn’t a fallacy. Morphology, lexicology, and diachronic linguistics are all deeply etymological sciences. An “ety-mon” is a word-form from which later words are derived. What Christians mean when they say “the etymological fallacy” is not a meaning at all. It is a brute force attack on semantic contiguity between morphemes. Third, Christians will argue: “Does the word ‘Butterfly’ literally mean a stick of butter fly-ing? No. Therefore, there is no necessary connection between a word’s component parts and its semantic value in our modern language game.” Yet, butterflies are likely called butterflies because when the word was contrived, there weren’t many cognates. Since the color of a butterfly is one of its more prominent features, it was likely named for the similarity of its color to butter. Understanding this makes butterflies feel all the more beautiful to me precisely because of the semantic value of its etymological story. So, in fact, the exception doesn’t prove the rule. It’s actually not an exception at all, because the rule is false in the first place.

Yet, the ego isn’t *not* the self. The ego is as natural to the self as fingers and toes. But we privilege this little ap-pendage of consciousness. Like the incompetent son of the boss who gets promoted to CEO of the company, our culture has literally donned the ego “the executive function.”

Wow. The ego is the CEO of the self, huh?

Very impressive. But it’s unqualified for the position. The ego is a channel for the self’s expression in the world. The ego is meant to be pliable. It is meant to feel organic, like a muscle. We are not meant to hate the ego.

The ego is not “the enemy.” It is not our friend. The ego *is* the self. The ego is a metonymy for the self. In the same way that you might say “Lawyers are just a bunch of suits,” you could say “The self is just the ego.”

Actually, that’s pretty true. But it’s not literally true. It’s just metonymy.

If it's not literally true to say "The self is just the ego," and yet it is basically true to say,

"The ego *is* the self," then how could we straightforwardly, in the *most* literal terms, describe exactly what the relationship between the self and the ego *is*?

Great question. Let's shorten it into two questions.

What is the self?

What is the ego?

Now we're getting somewhere. But there's a better question still.

Who's asking?

It's the ego. You might say, "How do you know it's my ego that's asking these questions? How do you know it's not my *real* self?"

Well, as we circle the drain to the answer, you might realize that in asking the question, you've already answered it.

Abstractions aren't real, and yet, they are all there is.

Only the ego makes a distinction between the self and the ego. The distinction is linguistic. Language isn't a game, as some have claimed. In fact, there is no such thing as

"Language." A language is a set of game pieces. Capital-L Language is an abstraction we contrive to contain these different sets within an identical class.

What do Chinese and English have in common? I know that you already have many answers in your head. Each contains letters. But

"letters" is just another abstraction we contrive to classify an even smaller collection of signs. What's a "Letter"? It's a unit in language. Is it primarily written or spoken? What is more fundamental to the language? The letter "b" or the sound "buh"? What's more fundamental to the Sun being the Sun —

waves or particles? This all sounds very pedantic, of course. But let's throw a curve ball in there.

Would the Sun be the Sun if the Moon were not the Moon?

If the Moon ceased to exist, would the Sun remain? You say, "Yes, of course!" But what you call "the Sun" isn't the ball of gas. It's the light in the sky. Asking if the Sun would exist without the Moon is trying to poke the head of a pin with the same pin's head, or to bite your own teeth.

In fact, without the Moon being the Moon, the Sun wouldn't be the Sun at all. It would just be another star in another

galaxy. So, you've caught on to my bullshit now, have you? "Ah, he's just making some stupid point about relativity." Yes and no. The Sun is a name. It is *our* name for one of our cosmic parents — often an abuser, certainly sometimes a lover. It is a symbol, fixed in the sky, as relative to us and our systems of thinking as the letter "b."

Light is only light to the eye. Breeze is only breeze to the skin. Death is only death to life. Life is only life to ... ?

Life eternal.

Oh, the years I spent trying to be excited about that concept. Let's not beat around the bush. What Christians call "Heaven" is fucking Hell. Life everlasting *in the same ego* forever?

Friend, that *is* burning alive for eternity. The psychological pain of extended life without any interruption of negation, without any *true* ego death, and without any *real* distinction between now and then, it is everlasting tor-ment.

Beneath our fear of death, we long for it.

We want to let go. What is *the best* feeling a human can experience in this world? Nope, it isn't sex. Nope, it's not the other kind of sex.

No! I said no! It's not the third kind of sex either. Get your head out of the gutter.

The best feeling a human can experience is when they come home from a long day with a fresh plate of their favorite food waiting

for them and their favorite streaming show *just* released a double episode. *And* it's Friday.

But the best part? *Collapsing into bed, knowing you're about to consume it all.*

What about winning a billion dollars?

Wouldn't that feel better?

No. Too much responsibility. Too much anxiety. Sure, it brings the *promise* of pleasure. But your ego will ruin all of that for you.

What's so great about collapsing into your bed after a hard day at work, knowing there are highly pleasurable and rare consumables waiting for you, is this:

You are loved.

However this whole system works, you felt its love in that moment. And that's why you remember it. And that's why you *always* want it. You *never* forget that you *love* to collapse into bed when you're tired. And you *never* forget

that you wish you had your very favorite things to consume when you do.

How you *earn* that for yourself is entirely your decision. You don't *have to* earn it. It's just *there*. It just happens. You can run yourself through a little game of "Sally should I?"

and police your pleasure. That's not wrong.

And it's not wrong not to do it. That's how you know it's love. And that's how you know it's the universe.

Existence is exactly what you think it isn't.

What is the universe? Take, for example, where you are right now. It doesn't matter what you're doing or what position you're in.

Everything in sight is a product of the universe. Your body, your belongings, your sensations, your room, your tidiness, your cleanliness, your income, your romantic and non-romantic

relationships, they all just happened to you.

Did you will them to happen? Sure. But let's break that down. Take your closest friendship. Bookmark that relationship at this exact moment in time. Now, zoom back to your very first meeting. At some point, shortly after that meeting, you made a decision to think of this person as a friend. And, hence-forth, you told yourself that you *chose* to be friends with this person, just as they *chose* to be friends with you.

But that's not true at all. That your friend even knows who you are is so, so, so, so, so random. They should not know who you are.

You should be completely anonymous to this person. If you walked up to them on the street, they *should* find you odd.

But they don't. Wow! What a miracle. What love! What great love from the universe. And then, everything that came after that? Wow!!!

Getting to meet them was just the start. Now, you actually get to talk to them, play with

them, be with them, rely on them. And you get to be the very special person who gives them that same happiness. Wow. What a miracle.

This random person, who should have never met you, or liked you, or spent even 5%

of the time with you that they have ... they just want to keep doing all of it over, and over, and over, and over again. Wow!

That's the universe.

Christianity is just abstraction porn.

You think you have an ego, an “executive function,” a CEO who’s got shit on lock. But you do not. You have a pinky-toe of your consciousness crowning itself chief vizier. That’s the ego. Your ego says: “Look what great friends I decide to have! Aren’t they so great?

I’m such a great friend-picker!” And, do you know what? You *are* a great friend-picker.

Your ego is completely right. There is no distinction between a “higher self” and a “lower self.”

There is no state of consciousness distinct from your own awareness which is different from or better than your present state of consciousness. The ego is not the problem of consciousness, but rather the prickly side of consciousness which picks up all the fuzz.

You want to have those prickles. They are unique to you, and yet having those prickles

— that self-awareness of your own “I” as a self — is what enables you to look into the eyes of another human being and see them both as self and “I.” As both the same as you and completely different in the same way.

The ego, which is merely a provisional state of awareness of oneself as a self, can sometimes get caught up in the executive game that other egos are playing. “That looks like fun!” And so, the ego plays the game and gets into the drug of control. Then, religion comes along and shames the ego for existing

at all, insisting that the ego is itself its own addiction to control. This is, of course, true and false. Once you become aware, you are, in a way, forced to play the game of control. The ego is the quality of consciousness that knows it's got its hand on the wheel, which through its periphery follows the double-yellow line.

But if the ego gets too into the game of control, and mixes that in with a religious impulse to shame that control, then they have planted the seeds of existential schizophrenia. The schism — the “split” — within the mind can't be resolved by pitting the ego against itself, because the ego *is* the self, and the self is indivisible. So, the ego must resort to abstract reasoning to play peacemaker for the schism between its control and its shame.

Abstract reasoning, then, asserts itself as the true reality — the necessity without which no inner conflict can be resolved.

The questions most Christians ask are questions that only come from living within

this schizophrenically induced abstract mindset for years.

- “Do I have free will?”
- “Or, am I determined by fate?”
- “How much control do I have?”
- “What do I have control over?”
- “What powers do I have?”
- “Where is the line between voluntary and involuntary?”

- “If I never asked to be here, isn’t it my human right to kill myself?”

Do you see the dovetailing of control and desire? Fear is the axis that joins those two emotions together to produce all of these questions. These questions are completely paranoid, neurotic, and consequently, insane.

When a flower buds, it doesn’t wonder if it did it well. If it could wonder such things, it wouldn’t. When a bird sings, it belts out a

song only for itself. No autotune. When a squirrel stores its nuts, it doesn’t calculate interest. When a cricket chirps, it’s not saying anything. It just loves to vibrate. That’s all we do when we speak. Vibrating. And we delight in the physical feeling of that vibration.

Try some of the above vibrations on for size. Ask the above questions out loud. Listen to how insane they sound. Listen to how ridiculous it sounds for you to be asking these questions about yourself. Only the ego asks these questions. They aren’t bad questions. Actually, they are quite fun to ask and play around with. But if you slip into a moment of forgetting, and actually start believing that *you* can access the answer to these questions, you have slipped into madness.

Here are the same questions, asked within a sane frame of mind:

- “Do I beat my own heart?”
- “How is a quark different from a black hole?”
- “How is a human different from a bug?”

- “What happens to “me” when I die”?
- “How could a parent be so terrible as to abuse a child?”
- “If every inside has an outside, and my body contains the “inside” of me, what’s the “outside” of me?
- “If I began as a sperm cell, and that sperm cell contributed to my father’s lust, doesn’t that mean, in a sense, I *fought* to have a shot at human life?”

In one regard, these are the questions religion was built to accommodate thousands of years ago. As the collective ego of the human species consolidated, and consequently its evaluation of its own privilege and intelligence, humans used religion as a trash bin for unanswerable philosophical questions.

They did this because they realized religion had nothing to do with real life. The only people who haven’t yet realized this are the religious people — the Christians, in particular.

Christianity has no answers to these questions. It could never answer them. They are not meant to be answered. They are sane questions precisely because they inquire about real states of affairs, not imaginary states of affairs. Compare the vocabulary of the questions. Notice how each question in the first set comes to an inflection point upon an abstraction. Free will. Fate. Control. Power.

Volition. Human Right.

None of these things are real. Like “Language.” Like “the Sun.” Like “Breeze.” It’s the tag on the clothing we forgot to rip off. But, again, if we do permit ourselves to slip into madness, we will begin to wear clothes *just* for what the tag

says. This is why Christianity and Capitalism work so well together. Both systems lull people into a deeply hypnotic

trance. A trance that has them fall in love with the transient. A trance that offers them a checkout portal to sell their souls. "Please, let it stay. Let it stay."

- The Volition.

- The Control.

- The Horse.

- The Car.

- The Battery.

- The Sun.

- The Moon.

- The Dollar.

- The Christ.

You may have been wondering when I was going to list out those Christian beliefs. Here, I have already done so. You see, none of what I would say Christians *believe* is even what they *really* believe. And that makes it difficult

to say anything critical about them, because they all publicly believe one thing for the sake of their Christian community, but privately believe the exact opposite things for the sake of belonging in this world.

- Human beings are totally depraved.

- "Well, not completely. And hey, Rick is a good guy."

- God will send you to Hell if you don't think that Jesus Christ can bench press more than Superman.
- "I'm gonna smuggle you into Heaven!"
- God loves you.
- "If you reject God, you deserve all the punishment Jesus received."
- Christianity makes complete sense.
- "Christianity can't make any sense, or else it's not really Christianity —
it's about *faith*, after all!"
- The Bible is literally God's word, which is why it's different than every other book.
- "The meaning of the Bible must be determined by understanding the human author's intent."
- Your works won't save you.
- "Faith without works is dead."

There is nothing wrong with this way of living and thinking. In fact, it is how we all live and think. Human beings are not fundamentally rational creatures. "Rationality" is a game Aristotle played, Augustine played, Thomas Aquinas played, John Calvin played.

But they also didn't. And we all know that the "didn't" part was unavoidable.

You literally *can't* be a consistent Christian.

If you were, you'd be out screaming in the streets, begging your loved ones to consider that Jesus Christ exists as an all-powerful, all-knowing God who sends many people to burn in everlasting anguish forever.

Wait, wait. That's becoming unfashionable.

Progressive Christians are converting hell into a "psychological Hell," which feels less intense. Or even better, a universalism. But still. Jesus is gonna be your boyfriend whether you want it or not. Consent not required. Rather, consent is demanded.

They would have you believe that this somehow makes the threat of Hell — or alien-ation from Christ — less of a threat. It's not.

Jesus Christ, in the Christian view, stands over the world and threatens them to believe in him. Read Romans 1. It's undeniable.

Wake up from your dream.

Christians — real, flesh-and-blood members of our society — decide every single day exactly what degree of this insanity they will take with them into their relationships, into their sense of the world, into their decisions, their judgments, their words, their plans. They believe there is a guy in the sky. This changes everything they do in each one of their lives.

How they think of you. How they think of themselves. How they vote. Their tone of voice. Their very conception of truthfulness, honesty, and most destructively self-honesty, is stripped and refashioned to accommodate their belief in an inter-dimensional super-being. They meet together once a week just to recharge their internal psychological relationship with this super-being.

I wrote this book as a cue to you with in your dream. A totem to remember that you

are allowed to say “No” to anyone for any reason. Many would lull you into believing that you “ought” to be a Christian.

The great ex-priest and philosophical en-tertainer, Alan Watts, told a story about God.

God and the archangel Michael decided to write a dictionary before they created the world. This dictionary would contain all the words that would be used by humans.

One day, God and Michael hopped in a cab together with the rough draft of this dictionary. The Devil hopped in the other door and persuaded them to include only two words.

“Ought” and “Should.” The whole world has been lulled into a dark sickness by these two words, and Christianity is the paragon of such a sickness.

Here is your totem. Many have already woken up from this dream.

Everything In Me Is Me

Roommates can be a real pain in the ass.

They can also be amazing fun. The closer you are in relationship to a roommate, the more they are vetted. The better systems you have for peaceful co-habitation, the better your experience of that roommate will be.

If you hardly know a roommate, you're probably not going to lease out half of your bed to them. But if you're in love with your roommate, you might not mind signing that lease. Sure, you've just made it impossible to enjoy the entire reason for having a California King mattress. But that tradeoff gives you

access to other roommate benefits that very few roommates are willing to fulfill.

That's the spectrum of roommates, right?

If you *have to* have a roommate, you have certain criteria through which you run that person's behavior and psychology in order to determine *what room they get*. Do they get the cupboard under the stairs or half the master bed? Or somewhere in-between?

What comes from you is you.

Let's get personal. What about roommates *in your own mind*? For the Christian, God is embedded deep within the psyche. He is "more inward to us than we are to ourselves," as I believe Augustine once said. Let's unpack that claim.

When you think private thoughts, how do you know those thoughts are *you*? How do you attribute the quality of privacy to them?

If Satan has access to them, they're not private at all. If God has access to them, they're not private at all. That is, if you *believe* God has access to them, then within the internal logic of your own mind, you can't conceive *any* thought as a private thought, even as you privately think it.

Let's say you're having coffee with a friend.

You admire their shirt. You think, "I love that shirt. I wonder where they got it." But *then* you think, "Is that *my thought* or *their thought*?"

Let's be very clear about this. The thought in question is this thought, occurring within the private confines of *your* mind: "I love that shirt. I wonder where they got it."

This is the perfect kind of thought to ex-amine, because it is a very self-conscious thought. In the very articulation of the thought, it references the present articulation itself. "I wonder where they got it." > "I wonder where." > "I wonder."

I wonder.

Who's wondering, exactly? Is it you? When you say "I wonder," are you lying? By the very act of saying it, you are telling the truth. The thought "I wonder" *is the wondering*. Perfect.

It's you! You're the one wondering where the hell this person got this fucking fantastic shirt. And by golly, you may some day just walk into the heavenly gates of the same store where they purchased the shirt and purchase it yourself.

That's *all you*. Sure, you've got a sprinkling of status anxiety, a pinch of capitalist aggression, and a cherry of what you think a shirt can *do for you* plopped on top. That's all mixed in there. But it would be inaccurate to say, "That thought is *your friend's thought* because *it's your friend's shirt*."

You think "I love that shirt. I wonder where they got it."

Not your friend's thought.

Not society's thought.

Yours.

No one else is thinking that same thought at the same time as you. If they are, they're not thinking about the exact same shirt. Or, even if they are thinking of the exact same shirt, they aren't thinking of it *inside your head*. What makes the thought yours is that it comes from within you.

This is the most important truth that I want to impress upon you now, and it's one truth that no Christian anywhere will ever be able to accept.

What happens in your head *is you, and no one else*.

Even if you accepted many toxic beliefs from your parents as a child, it was *you* that accepted the beliefs and internalized them.

Many people grow up in similar situations to you, and do not accept those beliefs. What makes everything *inside you* original *to you* is that it is *from within you*.

The Spiritual Intelligence Horde

Christians live in a much more confusing situation.

Let's say two Christian friends are having a coffee. Let's say that *you* are one of those Christian friends. Let's say, finally, that you believe that Christianity is true, that God is real, that Heaven and Hell, Angels and Devils are real, and that they can all communicate with you through signs and signals of many kinds.

Now, let's say that you, **Hypothetical Christian You (HCY)**, think to yourself: "I love that shirt. I wonder what they got it."

Boy oh boy. Whose thought was that? As a Christian, you can't immediately say, "It was my thought." You already have hundreds of memories of you thinking thoughts that, at the time, you believed to be you. But, as a Christian, you look back at those times and attribute those thoughts, occurrences, realiza-tions, and wonderings to other intelligences.

The world. The flesh. The devil. The Father.

The Son. The Spirit. Personal and impersonal.

Powerful and impotizing.

The Christian believes something strange.

If there were a hinge on the side of their head, and you could open the top of their skull on that hinge, you would look in and see something odd. Let's say that you could see

past the brain to what was *psychologically* there. In the non-Christian view, you see the

“You” that the brain hosts. In the Christian view, you see an entire ecosystem of autonomous intelligences of physical and supernatural sources. We can call this the **Spiritual Intelligence Horde (SIH)**. The Christian

has an odd digital Maps listing. Location: The Self.
Population: More than one.

Benevolent Spiritual Intelligences (BSIs) could be speaking through you. The Holy Spirit could be prompting you to get a new shirt, or showing you an opportunity to *encourage* someone by complimenting their shirt. God the Father could be pointing your attention to the craftiness of the shirt in order to magnify your sense of wonder at The Father’s craft in creation.

God the Son could be convicting you that you are too materialistic, and in seeing *how intensely you wonder where the shirt was purchased*, you are being instructed in your own sick, obsessive depravity with status, and all that shirts represent in our sinful culture. Angels also could be BSIs. They could be moving you in a direction that more closely aligns with a fate that would be fortuitous for you — one which necessarily includes having *that* shirt, or *knowing where* it was purchased.

Malevolent Spiritual Intelligences (MSIs) could be speaking in that voice as well. “I love that shirt. I wonder where they got it.”

Demons. Your own sinful nature. The Devil himself. You will often hear Christians say this when they articulate their own thoughts. “It was my sinful nature.” “It was the Devil sensing that I was up to something good, and so he made me

feel, or think, this thing.” Negative emotions and thoughts are commonly attributed to MSIs in Christian psychology.

Then, there is the self *itself*. This would be the *you* of you. The center of consciousness, which is not a *foundation*, but rather a center of gravity. It is a mass which attracts mass. To the degree that your center expands in gravitational force, it pulls objects in the world inward through *attention*. It picks things up that it likes. Fun things. Gross things. Interesting things. Bugs. Jewelry. Coffee. Cool-looking sticks. Whatever “grabs your attention.”

The cool thing about having objects grab your attention is that *your attention* is actually

the thing that grabs *them*. There are an infinite number of things in the world that could be selectively picked up by the mind for an infinite number of reasons. The fact that we ever pay attention to anything is, indeed, a mystery. Why? How? What is attention? When is attention happening? These are all fun questions, and they all point us back to mystery. But they *do* have content that tells us something specific.

Whatever your attentions *is* ... it's yours.

The Christian can never believe this. The Christian has a theoretical pie chart of all that falls within their field of awareness. Hypothetical Christian You must determine where *each thought comes from*. HCY doesn't own the title to the building of the mind.

HCY's mind and attention are *on lease* from other intelligences. And, your landlord has wired your building in such a way so as to enable any other kind of spiritual intelligence

(BSIs and MSIs) to speak through the megaphone of your own internal voice, which you call “I.” Because of this, any thought that ever occurs to Hypothetical Christian You can never be taken as yours for certain.

You have no idea which thought is yours, where it comes from, what it means, or what to do with it. Furthermore, when you try to decide which voice is which, you realize very quickly that in order to classify these voices, what you’re really doing is *classification work*.

You’re like an entomologist classifying a bunch of bugs. How does an entomologist do its work? Well, an entomologist needs criteria.

How many legs does it have?

How many eyes does it have?

Does it have antennae?

What kind of body does it have?

Does it have wings?

What are its genetic and biological idiosyncrasies?

Hypothetical Christian You has no such meaningful criteria. Yet, because you know you *must have some way* of identifying the thoughts in your head that are the original thoughts of HCY, which are BSIs, and which are MSIs, you start making up criteria. And, because you believe that the Bible is inspired, you think, “What better well is there from which to draw vocabulary than the word of God itself?”

Schizophrenic Bible Criteria

So, you come up with “**Schizophrenic Bible Criteria**” (**SBC**) to manage allllllllll those voices in your head. You’ve got to have Demon criteria. Angel criteria. Holy Spirit criteria. Sub-Category: Holy Spirit as a Channel for Christ, criteria. Sub-Sub-Category: Holy Spirit as a Channel for Jesus Christ, who is a Channel

for The Father criteria. Sin-nature criteria.

Nature-nature criteria.

But what are we really saying in all of this? What do we already know? What does Hypothetical Christian You ... already know?

The criteria are arbitrary. You don’t *really* know. You say, “This voice told me to kill someone. Obviously demonic. Obviously not from God.” Really? Which part of you is from God, again? You’re saying that the murderous impulse *couldn’t* have come from that part?

What about when God commanded Israel to kill all of the Gentiles and to smash the heads of all their babies on the rocks?

Remember, Lord,

what the Edomites did

on the day Jerusalem fell.

“Tear it down,” they cried,

Everything In Me Is Me

“tear it down to its foundations!”

Daughter Babylon,

doomed to destruction,

happy is the one

who repays you

according to what

you have done to us.

Happy is the one

who seizes your infants

and dashes them

against the rocks.

— Psalm 137: 7-9.

Mmmmmmm. Theological napalm in the morning. Hey, man. That’s fucking biblical. I know, I know. It’s a cliché critique of Christianity. But the point isn’t that the Old Testament God is a big meanie. We are hopefully touching a deeper nerve here. If anything, the

Old Testament God *at least* had some fucking personality. Jesus was gaslighting narcissist. I can’t believe anyone ever followed him. The crucifixion was the lamest frat bro dare in history. “Epic, bro!”

Nobody cared. No one except a few people he took advantage of during his “ministry.”

There's a reason his business didn't globally scale until after he was brought to justice.

The cross wasn't enough, in my view. Think of all the widows and orphans that lost their parents because they gave their lives to the Christian religion. All of those poor children lost their livelihoods because their parents got way into the 1st century version of a Net-flix show. It's terrible and tragic. Anyway. Back to the point.

Your Schizophrenic Biblical Criteria for determining which voice was God can't apply to the instinct to murder in cold blood. We know that God *does* sometimes instruct murder in cold blood, and indeed blesses those who murder *in vengeance*. Many prophets and

priests in the Old Testament prayed that God would murder their enemies "for your name's sake."

Back to Hypothetical Christian You. How do you do it? How do you make it work? How do you decide which voice is *you*, which voices are BSIs, and which are MSIs? The appeal to value (i.e., God-sourced thoughts never command to murder) can't work.¹

¹ Technically, Dispensationalists have a better argument against me here. They can at least argue that there is a radical discontinuity between the Old and New Testament ethics. Presbyterians and the Reformed, on the other hand, believe that David was saved by the work of Christ, and that his life was an exemplar of the New Testament moral ethic, and was ultimately fulfilled in plentitude and contiguity by Christ. They will always meander and never admit the failings of their system, so there's no point arguing with them about it. But Covenan-tal theologians really are fucked here.

Murder is just an example. Let's take something more plain. Let's use something more Jesus-ey. Jesus said to love your enemies. Great. So, let's say you have an enemy. And let's say you want to destroy that enemy for good reasons. That

enemy might be abusing people, hurting people, and will never stop until they are killed. Let's say they find a bunch of other folks just like them, get organized (they're organized!), start some kind of ISIS type situation. Boom. "Love your enemies." We are so politically disconnected from those realities that we rarely are forced to apply this kind of criteria. We socially manage our lives so that we don't *have to* have enemies to love. Christians don't have enemies. That's how they love their enemies.

Fundamentalist and Progressivist Christianity

Okay, Hypothetical Christian You. What happens when you're coming to terms with a

Covert Passive-Aggressive Narcissist in your life? They have abused you, manipulated you, lied to you, hurt your children, betrayed your love, and driven your spouse into madness.

Most Christians in the 21st century don't know this kind of pain. They don't have to make difficult decisions that require them to

"love their enemies."

In response, they will do one of two things.

Either they will cut that person out of their life and claim that "they have issues," which they certainly do. But in this case, they are failing to love their enemies. At the moment someone unmasks themselves as an enemy through chronic abuse, they are cut out. Love decreases.

Alternatively, and this is much more common in American Christianity, they will simply normalize the abuse. Especially if the narcissist is *also* a Christian. They will take the abuse *in toto* and subconsciously accept all of the premises about themselves that the narcissist needs them to believe. Theologically,

they already accept that God has the right to do to them what the narcissist has done. If they believe in God's sovereignty in a Calvin-ist sense, which is to say that God

controls everything one way or another, then they believe that even the narcissistic abuse they experience from other people is really *from* God somehow, for some purpose.

Here's the real truth.

Because Christians cannot justify their identification of a center within their own consciousness which is distinctively *them*, they never have the credibility with themselves to say "No" to abuse. If only they knew that it was the need to justify themselves to themselves which *is* the madness which religion can become in the individual psyche.

More than that, they are taught to develop an abusive relationship with themselves. They rebuke themselves. They chastise themselves.

They think, *Stupid. Stupid, Stupid! Sinful. Sinful,*

Sinful! And if you were to say this to them, they would say, "Yeah, that's unhealthy. I don't do that. That's something only fundamentalist Christians do."

What they don't realize is that all Christians do this. Some codify it as part of the system, and these systems become fundamentalist social groups. Or, they suppress it for the sake of feeling like a normal human being. But the trade-off of this is cognitive dissonance. And sustained cognitive dissonance at the level of your very identity will, eventually, drive you into cruelty or madness.

The fundamentalist inflection of the Christian system rejects this cognitive dissonance, accepting the tradeoff that people outside the system will think they're assholes. The progressivist inflection of the Christian system accepts this cognitive dissonance, accepting the tradeoff that people

within the system will perpetually point out the obvious harmfulness that such cognitive dissonance causes.

There is no Christian system that offers a path to mental wholeness. Every single Christian system requires you to create a pie chart of your inner, private experience, and pay attributive royalties to BSIs and MSIs. What slice of the pie is left for you is never put into ink. This is because, in fact, the whole point of creating a pie to slice up is for religion take the whole thing.

As soon as you attribute one of your own thoughts to another source of intelligence, that attribution becomes a psychological cancer. Once you give up 1% of your internal attributional logic to an *external* spiritual intelligence, you give up the deed to the remaining 99% — not as a *real* giving, but as an offering to an abstraction, conceived within your own mind.

When religion becomes a cancer, it begins to consume all of your consciousness. Slowly, and then by surprise, your own center of consciousness is gagged and bound in the cellar

of your subconscious. You can never supply justified psychological criteria for distinguishing between your own thoughts and the

“thoughts” which are really spiritual intelligences speaking through the megaphone of your own private mental voice.

You haven't been purchased. You've been pillaged.

Christianity, in the very claim that you can fellowship with God through faith, has lulled you into the madness of believing that God owns the deed to your private mental life.

These are the hooks that *real people* put into your mind in order to manipulate you. When a religious community convinces you that the events of your mind are not 100% you, that's their way of jamming controls into your mind and pushing buttons of your behavior and

emotions that should never be operated by another human. This is, of course, psychological exploitation, and its possibility says nothing about its health. The fact that people can live long, seemingly normal lives in this condition says more about the resilience of the human body than it does the healthfulness of being psychologically exploited through the religion concept, which occurs in every instance in Christianity.

In this madness, you hereby access worlds of spiritual communities (which are of course unreal) which are normalized as natural spiritual practices within evangelicalism. If this is a description of your mental life, then the truth is not that God owns the deed to your mind, but rather that your religious community has succeeded in their psychological heist.

Christianity turns your private residence into a party house for its own fictional intelligences. And, because this is all

supposed to be normal, and because it has behind it thousands

of years of intellectual argumentation, it is very difficult to evict these voices.

But the truth is that you *do* own the deed to your own mind. God never took it from you, because he was never *in there* in the first place. The demons don't speak inside you.

Your sinful nature doesn't speak inside you.

God doesn't speak inside you. What happens inside you is entirely, and without exception, you.

That can be a weighty truth to carry. You have accepted that all of your sophisticated criteria were rules that you invented in order to play a game with someone who doesn't exist. But the primary game you were playing wasn't with God. It was with other Christians.

It was with society. But the real, fundamental game you are playing by attributing your thoughts to other intelligences ... this is a game you play with *yourself*.

When the demon speaks, it is the demon you. When the Devil speaks, it is you, the Devil. When darkness speaks, it is the taboo.

Wherever you insert terms such as "Good" and

"Evil" into your own private mental life, you sever flow between aspects of your consciousness, and they calcify to create the illusion of ontological permanence.

But you don't have parts. You have thousands of rules, promises, and beliefs that you've accepted throughout your

life for any number of reasons. If you close your eyes, take out your headphones, and turn off your screens, you can listen. And you can hear. You can hear every single moment in your life that contributes to your current stream of consciousness. You can see that behind the abstractions of the divine and the demonic, there is only you.

I don't even need to argue this point. You already know it. When Hypothetical Christian You became a Christian, you were *doing something* with that. You were achieving something *real*. That doesn't mean that God, in the Christian sense, or in any other sense, *is real*.

That is beside the point. The point is that

when you do what you call something *spiritual*, you are, even more fundamentally, doing something *psychological*.

Imagining You Are God's Imaginary Friend

When you accepted Jesus Christ into your heart as Lord and Savior, that really *did* accomplish something positive for you. I don't know what it was. It's different for each person. When you pray, when you read the Bible, when you interact with various kinds of thoughts that you have, words like "God," "Demon," "Holy Spirit," and "Sin Nature" are very helpful ways of *tagging* lines of code that you don't entirely understand.

This is why Christians often have this odd mixture of extremely sophisticated self-awareness and complete self-idiocy. Christians *really do* have an above-average grasp on their own mental lives, because they

spend much more time focused on it than the average American. Christians are, perhaps more than most, *acquainted* with themselves.

But what Christians are *not* is self-aware, because their categories, criteria, and classifications are all custom builds. They are built to prioritize and center abstractions rather than realities. The personal intelligences which end up "moving in" to the attributional chain of logic in the private life of your mind are, in truth, closest to what non-Christians call "imaginary friends."

What is the difference between an imaginary friend and an imaginary idea? The imaginary idea can actually become real, because there is no intelligence attributed to the idea.

I might have an idea to go get an ice cream from my favorite ice cream store. I imagine what that could be like, what the

consequences of that are for my bank account, for my health, for my family, and for my happiness. I consequently choose either to bring that imaginary idea into reality or to keep it

fictional, permitting it to remain in my mind as mere potential.

The idea of getting ice cream doesn't talk back to me. I might debate with myself whether I even really *want* ice cream, or something else. But that debate happens *with myself*. I construct a dialogue between two competing components and put them into conversation. I automate my calculation of their pros and cons through my very powerful human brain, and when that automation is complete, I make a *final* decision.

If I feel the automation was insufficient, I may waver on that decision. Or, I may make it, but feel less confident that it was the right one. With ice cream, it may be less important.

But this is also how we make the most important decisions in our lives. This is why it's so easy to get caught in the trap of over-thinking. We believe that if we can extensive-ly verify the legitimacy of our decision-automation *enough*, then we have a higher probability of making the right decision. Consequently,

we avoid the consequences of living in a world that is merely imaginary, and not real.

But the imaginary friend doesn't submit to automation — at least, not in the conception you are threatened into believing in Christianity. He has his own personality. He has his own opinions. He has his own backstory. He has, presumably, a private life *of his own* to which *we* do not have access.

But the God concept is even worse. The God concept insists on being a friend to us within our own minds who gets to tell *us* what to do. And we don't get to ask why. We don't get to know *his* reasoning. Only *he* can make commands. Only **Imaginary Friend God (IFG)** can decide whether we are making the right choice or the wrong choice. Or, if we are good or bad. Or, if we are crazy or not. Or, anything.

Imaginary Friend God is the one who runs *his automation* on *us* from within *our own minds*. Imaginary Friend God runs the show. In

fact, for Hypothetical Christian You, as far as your private mental life is concerned, you are *God's* imaginary friend. However, you are not an imaginary friend in *God's* mind. Rather, you are God's imaginary friend in *your own mind*.

This is the architecture of Christian psychology, and it is not debatable, alterable, or surmountable.

Christianity cannot be true, because the very idea of truth assumes a *you* which can attribute a property of "truthfulness" to a particular claim. What happens if you "think"

something is true, but aren't entirely certain which intelligence is the source of that thought? In this case, and in the Christian view of the mind, inquiring whether the claims of Christianity are "true" is already putting the cart before the horse.

You have to have a "You" before you can have a "True."

And, while Christians may claim that there is certainly a "You," what they erase is the necessary precondition for the phenomenon of consciousness itself: *The very notion of a private mental life*.

**To believe in a “you” is
first to be a “you.”**

Either you have a center of consciousness which can assent to the truthfulness of claims, or you have a pie chart explaining what percentage of your thoughts arise from alternate intelligences. Along with this pie chart is a key — your “criteria” for determining which thought comes from which intelligence. This key is the real lie of Christianity.

The possibility of supplying yourself with criteria for managing multiple intelligences speaking through your own voice to your own mind is a psychological impossibility, making Christianity a psychological impossibility.

Christianity, on this basis, can't be true.

Faith Is Not Supernatural

“If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you”

(Matthew 17:20). Those are the words of Jesus. And he’s not wrong. Faith is a very powerful human act. By believing that we could move mountains, we have in fact moved mountains. This reality is not supernatural, because it is deducible by observing nature.

In fact, Jesus may have realized this profound truth because he was a student of the Hebrew Bible. “Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no com-

mander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest” (Proverbs 6:6-8).

The Bible itself instructs humans to com-pare themselves to ants, to learn from them, and to become like them in ways that facilitate human prosperity. Well, what’s a mountain to an ant? An ant hill. How are ant hills built? By ants. It’s not really a profound stretch of the imagination to look at an ant hill, then look up at Mount Zion.

Ant hill.

Mount Zion.

Ant hill.

Mount Zion.

Ant.

Human.

Ant.

Human.

Right.

You say: "Remove hence to yonder place."

What happens to an ant hill if you kick it over? It removes hence to a yonder place.

What happens to a mountain if you do ...

something else? Perhaps that could be moved to a yonder place, too. And, if you really believe in the power of human potential, and if you are used to comparing what ants can do to what people can do, then sure. If you've got the faith to move a mountain, why not move a mountain?

For a 1st century person to conceive moving a mountain is not that hard. Especially if you have roads like the Romans did. And, he was right. How prophetic of him! Just like many physicists and philosophers in the mid-20th century who predicted artificial intelligence, and primitive conceptual models of the internet, based the first computers

— Turing Machines.

Sure, Jesus probably meant something very spiritual and what Christians call "eschatolog-ical" by that. Nothing was ever just anything

for Jesus. A mountain was never just a mountain. It was *the* mountain on which he would return. It was the hypothetical mountain which the prophet Isaiah foretold would be flattened when God came to earth, to make a flat way for him. This is what Jesus wanted his hearers to believe Isaiah

was talking about — himself, and the very faith that could have as its object *only* him.

“Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain” (Isaiah 40:4). Jesus was subliminally tagging himself as the messiah.

He did so explicitly and implicitly thousands of times. Jesus was a brilliant marketer for his day.

**Faith is just the
imagination having
fun.**

Let’s apply this to the 21st century. Well, we don’t need faith to move mountains anymore.

We have dynamite. The truth is that what made Jesus right when he talked about moving mountains with faith was the conceptual possibility of the existence of dynamite in the future to achieve such ends. Jesus didn’t know what a stick of dynamite was. But he knew what an ant was. And he knew that humans could be infinitely more genius in their industry than ants. And, if ants move mountains, what could humans do?

Jesus had faith in human industry, and he expressed this sentiment through an ideolog-ically encoded language to a religiously and politically extremist audience.

But it’s even deeper than that. Jesus was probably correct in saying that faith could

move mountains in an even more profound sense than we would be tempted to concede, even today. It feels like a cheap trick to say,

“Jesus was right! Look! We’re moving mountains!” The truth is that the way we move mountains now is *not* by faith. But that’s only because we know what dynamite is. We have been born into an infrastructure that automates the fulfillment of travel needs on its own. If there is money to be made, commerce to be expanded, or land to be acquired by moving a mountain, you better believe we’re going to move that mountain.

Is it really beyond *our own* imaginings that in the future, humans may be able to speak to a mountain: “Remove hence to yonder place,”

and some other technology would move that mountain? Of course it’s not beyond our imagining. We have already seen this technology portrayed in film, and the mechanics aren’t really that complicated. It’s just a matter of having a reason to do it. If the market demands that each human should be able to

move a mountain on command, and we can supply humans with that power in a way that is non-destructive to the stability of the market itself, then we have every reason to think that we would be able to grant human beings that power.

What, then, is faith? We can take our lead from the Bible again. “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). That’s a pretty common human capacity. It’s actually what Aristotle called “the imagination.” For Aristotle, the imagination was the faculty of the human mind by which we could hold mentally

present objects which were not physically present. The imagination was the human's way of intellectually conjuring realities.

When you think more deeply about this philosophical definition of the imagination, it's plain to see that we recruit this faculty in many times and places in our lives. To remember deceased loved ones. To yearn for loved ones who are in a distant place. To recite

facts for a quiz. To buy groceries. To pay our taxes. The imagination is a critical faculty in the production of coherent human activity.

The imagination is the freeway between the the intellect and the will. The imagination transports concepts we understand into a place where they can become non-physical, actionable realities for us. The imagination is the human tool that enables us to convert potentiality into actuality. Pure and simple.

Faith, in fact, is just a specific act of the imagination. Faith is an object-dependent word. I have faith in basically everything. That my language can carry the meaning I intend to communicate. That my thoughts are encoded in a language which can sustain a real-time intellectual current between the world as it is and the world as I see it in my mind's eye. I don't have faith in love, though.

A common Augustinian argument for the necessity of faith. Love is an abstraction. It is a tag that we put onto a certain collection of

feelings, experiences, cooperations, roles, and behavior-types.

Love, of course, isn't "real" in any sense. But it is a very live concept in human life. If we were to remove the word "Love" from the English dictionary, we would have to replace it with something immediately. We couldn't live with that semantic gap in our lives for more than a few seconds. We must love *ourselves* in order to make sense of any decision we might make on our own behalf.

Faith is meant to serve its holder.

When I say that I believe something, it means that I privately take something to be true, but only provisionally, and only in so far as it accommodates my personal enterprise of human flourishing. I know something which only I know. I know a secret. It is a secret between me and the universe. Only I can know

it, because belief is something that happens within my own mind. You can never know whether what's happening in my mind is the kind of thing that's happening in your mind.

But I do know one thing: you and I both have faith in *everything*. That's just being human.

Christians often lay claim to this term, as if it belonged to them. But it does not. They would insist that "faith" is only "true faith" if the object is Jesus Christ himself. That's a fine enough claim, as long as we recognize that there is no reason to define faith in that way.

Faith is a reliance on something that is non-physical. If I sit down in a chair, I have faith that it will hold me. In my first homiletics class in seminary, I used this illustration to demonstrate what it means to have faith in Christ. In a way, I was exactly right. Sitting down on a chair, and trusting that it won't break, is *just* what I do when I believe that Jesus Christ is God and has died for my sins and been raised for my salvation. But my error in

my sermon illustration was that I didn't go *far enough*.

The real truth is that sitting in a chair and believing in Jesus are *exactly* the same thing.

Neither are justifiable, and neither are different from one another in any identifiable way.

Sure, we might say that one is physical, and the other is something more complicated. But it really isn't. We don't know what physical material is any more than Christians know what the chemical composition of the physical body of the resurrected Christ is made of.

We don't have answers to any of those questions.

When you burrow down deeply into the nature of faith, you realize that faith is not something you can lose. Faith is something *you do* every day with everything at every time in every place in every moment of consciousness. The next question is: "Do you have faith in Jesus?" No. Of course not. I have no reason to. But here is where we must reclaim a very common sense fact that Christians

would have us believe is false. When I conceive, even as a non-Christian, of putting

"faith" in Christ, I am not conceiving of some special activity that only religious people do.

I am conceiving of extending a very common, natural human action to one more object. This object, being Jesus, is not distinct in class from any other object. Contra many atheists, the idea of Jesus Christ being God is not more absurd than the idea of getting in your car and driving to a coffee shop. Depending on your vantage point, either one could be awesome or ridiculous or terrifying or evil, or whatever.

But here is what you need to know. "Faith"

is not a Christian act any more than pooping is a Christian act. Both are natural. And, it is important for us to

understand that “faith in Christ” is not all that different from what humans do with faith every single day. But this twofold assertion protects us from Christianity on both sides, because critiquing Christianity can never be done in a single syllogism.

There is always a Scylla *and* a Charybdis —

two convex horns that would pin us — and to successfully see past the mirage of Christianity, we must always be fighting not only with both hands, but with both hands and both feet.

Faith in Christ is not supernatural.

In order to understand how “faith” is not at all what Christians *need it to be* in order for Christianity to be true, you must accept two very common sense truths at the same time.

You must accept both that faith is completely natural, *and* that faith *in Christ as the second person of the Trinity* is completely natural.

Both of these acts fall within the normal scope of common human activity, and neither strains the imagination faculty beyond its healthy range of motion.

If you have left the Christian faith, this assertion may frighten you a bit. Let me explain.

Faith in Christ is normal. It really is. Not just because it's common, but because it's completely reasonable. It's not reasonable because *it's true*. Think about it this way.

What does Christopher Nolan do with his imagination? Personally, I think he does something far more imaginative than what the New Testament writers did. *Much* more imaginative. I think Nolan strains the imagination, and therefore acts as a man “of faith,”

far more than Christianity demands of its adherents. He must *see things that are not there*.

But there's a difference between what film writers and directors do with faith and what Christians do with faith. Writers and directors must *manifest* what they see in their mind's eye. Christians merely point to a formal ap-

proximation of a reality which they do not understand at all, and can never articulate in concrete terms.

This is why it is so important to the Christian system that Jesus has a physical body. He must *be* the concrete manifestation of their imaginative act that they can never manifest.

Faith in Christ feels so unnatural, not because *faith* is unnatural, but because nothing *real* is ever conjured by the Christian imagination when pointing to Christ. The concreteness of the life of Jesus is the very thing that you must have faith *in*, not the the thing which you believe *per se*.

You can never manifest your faith in Christ.

You can draw dotted lines around what you say is faith in Christ and what you do as a natural human being and say *Voila! The Christian Life!* But that is pure fiat. And, fair enough. That's what I do, too. That's what I do constantly. I can never do anything *but* insist and assert and ask for the trust of others that what I'm saying I'm believing is really what's in my mind's eye.

However, I never have to prove it to anyone. I never engage in apologetics about my

faith. I couldn't. It wouldn't work. No one would believe me, because the medium and the message don't comport. My very act of speaking my own mind *is* the manifestation of my faith which Christianity can never replicate. Christ is never made manifest in anything. This is why it is so important to Roman Catholics that Christ be made physically manifest in the Eucharist. This actually makes sense and is closer to what faith is. But a

“spiritual presence” cannot be the object of faith. To say “Believe in Christ” is like saying

“One to the onenth power.”

We are *already* doing it. We are *already* believing what we can’t demonstrate *all the time*. Even in our most demonstrative and demonstrable acts and beliefs, we are all already “people of faith.” Now, to say, “Put your faith in Christ” situates the listener in a real quagmire.

Christian faith isn't really faith.

The Christian must assume that the person they're speaking to doesn't already have faith.

They must assume that there is some meaningful distinction between what people do every day and what Christians are asking them to do in a selective case. There is no difference. And, because of that, the act of putting faith in Christ is itself inconceivable in terms of the very faculty which Christians would have us recruit in order to relate to Christ.

I can relate to Christ in many ways. I can even relate to him by faith. But, let's say that I do believe in Christ for one reason or another.

It is no different from what I do every single day. Therefore, the word "faith," used in a special case, inserts a religious superstition into the act which is already itself beyond comprehension simply in the natural order of

things. The segmentation of "faith in Christ"

and "living my life" is the lie on which the entire evangelistic enterprise is predicated.

Faith is a way of being in the world. Faith in Christ is a way of being outside the world.

Faith in Christ is a way of pointing to and attempting to manifest something that is wholly other to our normal, natural faculties, which *rely* upon our ability to believe in things for which we have no evidence and cannot supply immediate proof.

Of course there is no proof for Christianity.

That doesn't mean anything. It could still be true. Jesus could still be up there, fulfilling his

"Guy in the Sky" role like a boss. But if he *were*, "faith" isn't the faculty I would use to relate to him. Faith is a way of holding present things which are not really present to us.

Christians will always say, to every argument against their system: "Of course it doesn't make sense. That's what it means to be supernatural!"

Consequently, and with the thrust of this presumption, they orbit around irrationality and call it "faith." They perpetually defer the question of whether what they put their faith in is *really real* until they *must* supply some sort of referent. At this point, they either appeal to the supernatural or write a 700-page apologetics book.

But faith doesn't need apologetics. Faith is a way of operating common sense. Nothing that is common sense needs a 700-page book to convince you to believe in it. Because faith is a private faculty, and serves to accommodate ways of seeing the world within each organismic lifespan, it cannot be *commanded*.

To command faith in something is like commanding certitude in something. "Be certain!"

Well, I'd like to be. But I most definitely am not. "Put your faith in Christ!" If he ever shows up, I might. But faith isn't meant to accommodate contrivances. It is meant to sustain our reliance on the non-contrived. And there is nothing so contrived in all the ideas in this

world than the notion that Jesus Christ, 1st century messianic figure, is sitting on a throne somewhere sending people into a chronologically persistent fire. It would be a miracle.

Sure. But, again, miracles are ways of *expanding* our understanding of the world. The notion of faith, and the notion of the miracu-lous — these notions are *supposed to be* epis-temologically non-destructive. They are supposed to facilitate human wellness. They are supposed to feel as uniform as our very identities feel. This is why most people who feel very *non-uniform* in their identities have grown up in very *Christian* households. They were raised in houses in which they were not permitted to conceive of faith as a natural human capacity which they could recruit to explore both the most mundane and mysteri-ous aspects of human experience.

Rather, it was stuffed into a single operation with only a single legitimate object. And, because of that, their very identities were

malformed, and their true selves were repressed. *Faith* might have been that very thing that helped that non-binary person see *beyond* gender norms to a way of conceiving human identity that accommodated *their* organismic idiosyncrasies. But that opportunity to use faith in that way was robbed from them.

Christianity doesn't own the trademark on belief.

Christianity can't be true, because you can't be a Christian without faith in Christ. On the basis of what we have so far discussed, you can't have faith in Christ the way *Christians*

insist you must have it — that is, unless you reject that the notion of faith itself has any legitimate object other than Christ. This is a psychological impossibility. Even if Christianity

were true, faith would have nothing to do with Christ. There would have to be some other word, because “faith” is a psychological act that humans perform too often every single day to be routed exclusively to Christ.

Christians might say, “Yeah, but look at Augustine! He believed you could have faith in love, too!” Right. Augustine was inconsistent, like all Christians. Augustine wrote a book called *Retractiones* at the end of his life, tak-ing back a lot of cooky shit that he wrote. And he still never articulated a coherent system.

But it was Augustine that shaped the imagination of Luther, who was an Augustinian monk, the spiritual criminal responsible for the death of tens of thousands in Europe in the late pre-modern era. *Pecca fortiter!* Sin boldly!

As with all Christian claims, this is of course a half-truth. Sin boldly. Against whom?

Wouldn't this be to act ... without any faith at all, in the Christian definition? Wouldn't the act of sinning boldly be precisely that act

which nullifies the possibility that the actor understands what *true faith* really is? You can feel all of Augustine's unresolved retractions refracting throughout Western history through the prisms of Aquinas as Luther. The contradictions of the Christian system not only *weren't* resolved. They were multiplied, and became so infinitely incoherent, that they became a tight-knit cultural fabric which gagged the

imagination of the West until Descartes cracked open the egg and Kant cooked it.

It is hardly accurate to say that the claims of Christianity are false. It is worse than that.

They are default. They are fraudulent. They are deceptive. They twist the human person into shapes that no person should ever be twisted. Christianity is a torture device. The only reason it feels so normal to Christians to *be* Christians is because faith *really is* a very natural human act. In the same way that you might hang someone by a very small part of their body just to exacerbate the pain receptors

in that one single part, Christianity hangs its constituents by their faith. The skin wasn't meant to be hooked into and hung by. Neither was faith meant to be channeled to Christ, to a single object. Faith is not meant to be a channel of devotion. It is meant to be a means of survival, prosperity, communal cooperation, and enjoyment.

Be the ant. Have more faith even than Jesus, even than The Apostle Paul, even than Augustine. Have faith to move mountains by innovating technology. Have faith to move mountains by seeing the unseeable and manifesting it in our world for the betterment of all living creatures, great and small. Have faith, fellow children. And protect that faith from the predations of the cruel.

Christianity can't be true, because faith as Christians define it isn't actually faith at all.

Theology Has No Content

Theology does not supply any original content to the world. It is all borrowed from other places, disciplines, and people. Psychology, by example, is an inductive science. It has methods that are self-verifying. Even as a soft science, psychology to some degree participates in publicly peer-reviewed experimental protocol which verify the original hypotheses, the ethics of its experimentation, and the repeatability of each study's findings.

Meta-analyses are published to review these findings at scale, and even further, meta-analyses are performed *on meta-analyses* to propagate the inheritance of knowl-

edge, the appropriate metadata thereof, and the quality of each kind of finding. Moreover, this process enables students and practitioners of the discipline to *retrieve* older study results and reinterpret them in light of new methods that may be more sound.

As the science evolves, it has a light-touch way of carrying with it all of its findings without becoming burdened by the complexity of an exponentially growing knowledge base or the dogmatism of unsophisticated statistical analysis. Psychology incorporates mathematical, physical, linguistic, and other scientific disciplines that run in parallel to its inquiries so that its development can occur alongside the maturation of other disciplines within the academy.

Sure, there are weird studies and proposals that slip through the cracks on the more humanities-oriented side of things, but that is to be expected. And, that is not a bad thing for the discipline. If a laughable study is published, let them laugh. Let's all laugh at it.

Laughing at laughable things done in serious places is a way that society rejects false knowledge. But you need to have venues that take seriously their own seriousness, not through a disposition of austerity, but through publicly held assumptions and publicly verifiable methods.

Theology, on the other hand, contributes no original knowledge to the human race. It looks back to the Bible, and it pontificates.

Christianity, in truth, is the longest-running movie review podcast in the history of the world. The academic discipline of theology is a discipline which reflects *on* itself *to* itself *all by* itself. There is a reason that, the more

“into” theology theologians get, the more they get into *retrieval*. Theologians who are skilled do not get excited about the future of theology. They get excited about reappropriation.

Theology is a remix discipline. Theology is a franchise reboot discipline. Theology tells no original stories, has no unique terms with any descriptive content, and can offer other

academic disciplines nothing in the way of progressing human knowledge into the future.

Theology meets no human needs.

Theology is the most narcissistic discipline in the academy.

Theology has no publicly verifiable methods.

Theology contributes no original ideas.

Theology makes no coherent claims.

Theology supplies no principal assumptions of its own.

Theology informs no other disciplines, except perhaps for psychology, which needs to understand how to counsel people who bring religious assumptions into the counseling office.

Theology doesn't have to be this way. I don't know what it could be, but whatever it is *now*, it is simply the study of nothing. Theology masters nothing quite well. Theology is

a fantastic confidence game. Theologians are wonderful at convincing people that they have something to say by speaking about other disciplines. History. Philosophy. Linguistics. But when it comes to making its own original contribution to the academy, it just ...

doesn't.

The Trinity.

The Incarnation.

The Sacraments.

Even these are merely metaphors. And, when you get to the core of it, the problem is not that the Trinity can't be explained. The Trinity can *absolutely* be explained. But it cannot be described. And, if your expertise is in explaining something as reasonable which has no descriptive content, then you have bought into your own confidence game and are trapped in a trick of your own making.

Everything theology offers is borrowed.

Theologians are pretend-historians, pretend-philosophers

, and pretend-linguists. They are not *properly trained* in any of these disciplines. Sure, you may have a historian who believes the claims of Christian theology, who looks at the historical evidence for Christianity, and says: “Yes! Christianity is true.” But ...

the historian is not equipped to make this claim. This is a philosophical claim. One which Gottfried Lessing saw as an impossible sort of claim. Lessing wanted to affirm that Jesus Christ was God on philosophical grounds, and he wanted to affirm that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead on historical grounds. But he couldn't bring himself to claim that, because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead in history *that* he therefore was God. This, philosophers have called “Lessing's Ugly Ditch,” often misappropriated and misunderstood by those who throw the term around.

The problem with theology is this very problem. Lessing's ditch is only a part of the bigger problem, not with Christianity, but

with its conceptual and political center, which is the academic discipline of theology itself. This discipline, of course, is an abstraction. What I am really referring to is the community of theologians who have pretended to be experts in something when in fact they are experts in nothing for the past 2,000

years. When you push them on historical grounds, they move to the philosophical.

When you push them on the philosophical, they move to the linguistic. When you push them on the linguistic, they move to the historical.

The real expertise of theologians is not in any knowledge base in particular, but in the intellectual judo of throwing

experts in one discipline overboard into another and nullifying their credentials before they can aim at the core of Christianity. Theology is a sophisticated parasite that can *only survive by living in multiple hosts*. It is a game of oscillation between deferral and deference. Deferring to revelation when things are unreasonable, and

practicing deference to scholars in other disciplines that fortify their mosaic of claims when pushed on one particular claim.

Theology is a way of wiring multiple disciplines together to make claims about nothing look like claims about something. The give-away of theology's game is the fact that it actually supplies nothing. It has no content.

Everything it points to is an abstraction, or out of the reach of human verification somehow. Even the need for human verification is deferred to a time and place 2,000 years out of reach of human inquiry. We can only study the evidence for Christianity by looking through the kaleidoscope of documentary history which, by coincidence, has had mainly theologians as their custodians for that entire time. Those custodians have decided which documents get copied, and which don't.

Those custodians have decided which words in the documents were likely typos, and should be corrected for the sake of society, and which words were most likely accurate to

the original author's intention. Multiply this decision across thousands of monks across thousands of years, and the product is the 21st century discipline of academic theology.

Theology is only as powerful and as true as the society in which it exists allows it conceive itself to be. Because

theology does not generate any original value, it exists completely at the mercy of other disciplines. This is why theologians do not have academic credibility in the academy at large. They are not taken seriously, not because they are stupid. There are many brilliant, genius theologians who write very interesting things and make very interesting, original connections.

But what is academically original about their contributions is not theological, and what is interesting about their contributions is not interesting to the academy at large.

Theology, in this way, is a shell game.

What's the trick of a shell game? It isn't to be good with shells. It's to be good at misdirection. And the whole game of theology is one

of misdirection. If you look too closely into the divine, you will be rebuked for treading upon the sacred ground of divine mystery. If you look too closely into nature, you will be rebuked for failing to see the world through the eyes of faith. The ball is never in the shell it *should* be in.

Theology is just a magic trick. But the real magic of the shell game, of course, is the prestige. If you pick the wrong shell in a shell game, you expect the game leader to unveil the *real* shell with the *real* content. Otherwise, if you find that *none* of the shells any longer have any contents, then it will be clear that you've been tricked, and the game will be nullified, because the rules have been cheated by the game leader. He obviously removed the ball, and that's not what you bet on. You didn't bet whether he could remove the ball from the cup without you noticing.

You bet that you could guess the right cup after he switched them around. So, in order for a shell game to work, *you*, the

shell game

leader, must show the contestant the ball under *one of the other cups*. But theology never shows us the ball. It just says, "God made it this way, and you're wrong."

Who are the real ring leaders in Christianity? The real leaders are not the mega church pastors, the elders, or the Christian professionals who fund the organization. The real leaders are the theologians, because these are the people publishing books that make rich Christians, mega church pastors, and the like *feel* and *look* like they could actually have something intellectually credible to say. Otherwise, Christianity is just a gypsy myth. Yet, it is precisely the theologian who never pulls off "the prestige" of the magic trick. He cannot make the ball reappear. He can only show you the empty cup, tell you that you guessed wrong, and point to the cup that the ball is *really in*, but he cannot lift up the cup. He can only point to it and say, "This cup is Christianity, and this cup is the cup with the real value.

All others are empty."

Take, for instance, theological ways of explaining natural phenomena. "Why do flowers bloom the way they do?" A theologian will give you a biological explanation. And then, they'll say: "And, God made it that way." But that doesn't add any descriptive content to the explanation. In fact, it is a nothing statement. It's just the theologian putting the "theology" tag on the explanation. It's as if I were to walk into my favorite furniture store and write "Sold" on the tag of a piece of furniture I want to buy so that no one else can buy it before me. "And, God made it that way." "Sold."

It's the same.

Every theological declaration is the equivalent of the famous comedic scene in which the character “declares bankruptcy” by shouting: “I declare bankruptcy!” “You can’t just say that you declare bankruptcy.” “I didn’t say it. I declared it.” Theological methodology is never more sophisticated than this comedic interaction, and if you can’t see the comedic absurdity of theology, it’s because you’re too

heavily invested in its truthfulness. Your cred-it line is the one that needs saving, in your view. And, that view is one given to you by theology.

Poke one side of theology, and it protrudes on the other. Christianity, taken as both a social class and a social movement, is entirely derivative of this small group of ideologues.

What happens between them filters down to what happens through Christians at large. If a theologian says that God never wants a woman to hold the office of senior pastor, millions of Christian women will be subjugated to misogynistic rule, and likely internalize a self-hatred which they are forbidden from naming as such, only further complicating the harmfulness of such abuse.

Christianity can’t be true, because I have met these people. I have pushed them to the limits of their understanding of the very concepts which they claim to have mastered. I know that this isn’t something you can verify, and I won’t ask you to trust me that it’s true.

But I studied this discipline for many years, and have never once found a single person who didn’t, at the end of everything, have a very silly answer for why they believed what they believed.

The game is making it very hard to get that silliness. This is, of course, the very expertise of theologians — to make their silliness difficult to access. In fact, the whole game of theology is to build a sophisticated obstacle course between those who would be aggressive toward the Christian ideology and the frailty of this ideology's intellectual constitution.

Theologians are masters at contriving sophisticated ways of preventing you from seeing exactly how silly they are. The closer you get to seeing their silliness, the steeper the ascent of sophisticated contrivance - really, of sophistry.

Christianity can't be true because It has no identifying markers. No unique content. No original ideas. No construals of reality which

could properly be classified as unique to this set of people and ideas. The very truth claims which Christianity would defend are not even their own.

Christian claims are theological claims.

Christian claims can't be true because there are no such things as theological claims.

Signs Aren't Fixed

Semantics is the study of meaning. Semiotics is the study of signs. Linguistics puts these two fields of inquiry into conversation, and language is often taken to be whatever the interplay is between semantics and semiotics

— between meaning and the signs we use to articulate those meanings.

Words don't serve truth. They make it.

Speech act theory is a linguistic notion which pushes semiotics into a fuzzy place, a bit out

of focus. It says: "You can do a lot with speech besides make claims." Sure, you can say things like, "God exists." That is a claim that connects meaning and sign. There is some notion of a being who is somehow present in this world in a way analogous to what we would mean if we said "Flowers exist."

But a speech *act* indicates what you're *doing* with that vibrational energy. Speech act theory unveils how all human speech is ven-triloquism. We throw sounds around. We take them in. We tell stories.

"I'm sorry."

"Bless you."

"I now pronounce you man and wife."

"You're under arrest."

"I sentence you."

These are all acts of speech which are very different from *claims*. The act of speech is itself an act which could not be manifested without the speech. Or, if it could, it would

only be such a manifestation as a proxy for the speech. For example, a man might send flowers to his wife as an apology for being cranky over dinner the night before. That's a version of "I'm sorry" and, depending on the relationship,

the words may not even need to be said. But, in such a case, the words don't need to be said precisely because *they are implied*.

But this, of course, is all a farce. "I'm sorry"

is a collection of letters. That's all. It is semi-otically flat. What is the semantic content of

"I'm sorry"? What is the semantic content of a flower sent to a wife after being cranky ("I apologize")? What is the semantic content of a flower sent to a wife after her husband passes away ("My condolences")? The semantic content is still "I'm sorry," but it means something else entirely. Let's say her husband was hit by a car. The driver sends the wife a flower. That flower means "I'm sorry" in a third sense ("An apology is not enough").

Do you see how the relationship between meaning and symbol can't be nailed down?

Sure, we act as if we need some kind of permanent relationship between symbols and meanings. Permanent enough to be reliable.

But that permanence is an illusion. You know this. Whenever someone highlights the semantic transience of symbols, it is often shrugged off as a pedantic philosophical point. "I get it, I get it. You went to a liberal arts college. Everything's relative. Sure. Let's get back to real life."

Every Christian truth is just a word.

But, waiting inside real life is the same problem. In the real world, outside the halls of liberal arts colleges where freshmen are reading the postmodernists, there are these people that I know you've heard of. Christians.

These people have taken a single sign, no more of a sign than a flower, and exalted it to a high place.

Christians insist that all of their in-group members attribute unchanging permanence to this sign. They call this sign "God." But it's more devious than that. Behind this exaltation is a belief that being exalted is better than being laid low. Of course, in the Christian story, Jesus comes low. He becomes a human a being. He even dies on a cross and descends into Hell. So, Christianity has all its bases covered on why it does what it does with symbols.

And yet, it doesn't. Jesus doesn't move into Hell. What happens after Jesus visits Hell? He gets the hell out of there and moves back in with his parents up in Heaven. And the next time he comes down, it's only to make "down here" feel like "up there." God's going to do a whole remodel of this place.

He will terraform this earth, terraform our souls, terraform everything "low" into a "high."

The low is subjugated and the high is privileged.

Even when they are brought together, there is a competition, and the winner is always the same.

Christians might say, "God is present in Hell." Sure. But the physical body of Jesus isn't. It's on a ... what? A throne. What's a throne? It's a place impervious to attack, established as a political symbol to protect the one sitting on it. A throne can only exist in a throne room, for it is in a throne room that you can force a bottleneck of all incoming at-tackers down a long, narrow hallway that makes them sitting ducks.

Within the domain of the throne room,

"subjects" (the subjugated) stretch prostrate on the floor so that they cannot attack, they cannot rebel, they cannot surprise the throne-sitter. The throne is a seat for the deeply in-secure. A throne is a bureaucratic chair, and it is no wonder that the religion of bureaucrats makes the ruler's job title a bureaucratic one.

The throne is a sign. What's the meaning?

Well, you've got to have a referent for it. And,

if you have a referent, then the words don't really matter. Like a flower given to a wife who knows that the flower means "I'm sorry"

more than the words "I'm sorry," the word

"God," if God is real, should be completely disposable.

If you have a co-signer on a lease, that co-signer is the guarantor of that lease. The guarantor is responsible for payment to the landlord if the tenant defaults on payment. In language, the referent is the guarantor of the word. It doesn't matter if the word disappears, because the guarantor is fixed. The reality can be called anything, because it's real.

But, then you realize that reality is completely a matter of how you tell the story. And, stories are completely determined by gram-matical rules. So, we are lulled into believing that the rules of grammar and the laws of nature are one and the same. But they aren't.

There is no subject-object distinction in nature.

There is no "I-Thou" in nature. This is what Martin Buber got wrong. This is what even Derrida never really articulated, although I think he articulated it best. Whenever we speak about some reality, we are always selectively leaving something out, and that exclusion is a personal choice based on our own personal narratives which we construct in order to resist powers that militate against our survival. When we name something, we are surviving. When speak, we are already oppressing the world around us.

God is just a word.

What, then, of “God”? When we say “God,” what are we leaving out? Christians might say

“That he is one essence which exists in three persons.”
You’re mad, my friend! Fine. Let’s give *that* a word. “Trinity.”
What are we leaving out? “That the second person of the Trinity came to earth, lived a perfect life, died and

was raised for the salvation of sinful humanity unto reconciliation with this holiest God.”

My god, you’re insane, my friend! You’ve just traveled down three levels of an enormous decision tree, and excluded so much information from ever being integrated into your perception of reality. And you did it through language, which is just a collection of signs.

Don’t think so? Alright. Let’s throw out all of those words you just used.

God.

Trinity.

Person.

Salvation.

Death.

Resurrection.

Holiness.

You *need* all of these words, don't you? You simply *can't* give them up. You're addicted to them. You're reliant upon them. You might say,

"No, I could tell you the same story in Chinese

and use different words." Fair enough. But do you speak Chinese? Would you know exactly how what you are communicating is different? Is there any semantic loss when you move to Chinese?

If you say, "No, there's no semantic loss,"

then you don't know how languages work. If you say, "Yes, there is negligible semantic loss," then you have just conceded that it doesn't really matter if there is some semantic loss in the most basic articulation of the Christian system. And, whatever line you personally draw around that which can't be lost is just another symbol that you become reliant upon.

Language is the language of the ego. But language, of course, is just the play of semantics and semiotics. And so, you never get beneath it or behind it. Even your most profound, self-aware moments are linguistic, exclusionary, and by virtue of this, not only *miss-ing something*, but *exclud-ing something* in order

to make it all fit into a sensible articulation.

The Tale of the City of

East Meister

Imagine a city named “East Meister.” This is a quaint little town, but has enormous influence due its popularity as a tourist attraction for bird watchers. A specific species of bird flies here every Autumn to mate, and you can only see it mate in East Meister.

The Saga of Mr. Strongly Manly, Esq.

In East Meister, there is a superhero named

“Mr. Strongly Manly, Esq.” Mr. Strongly Manly, Esq. becomes a symbol for fighting injustice in the world. He inspires many to do good, and strikes fear in the heart of oppressors and abusers. Society loves him, and creates a culture of worship and gratitude toward this

symbol through the valorization of his personal qualities.

Little children train in his unique style of fighting, and little training camps pop up. Gurus are trained, certified, and employed in the arts of Mr. Strongly Manly, Esq. An entire economy develops around being *like* him. Living in a crime-free world for the first time, the people think, “This is what it should have been like in the first place.”

Mr. Strongly Manly, Esq. wears a logo on his chest to indicate that *he* is Mr. Strongly Manly, Esq., and this logo brands him as *different* from all others. In order to identify himself, and achieve his desired effect in society, he must exclude all others from his own claim to that brand, which is the very identity of his self.

The Conquests of Dr. Bravely Womanly, CEO.

Eventually, Mr. Strongly Manly, Esq. commits a heinous crime. He is punished and brought to

justice by a new superhero: “Dr. Bravely Womanly, CEO.” Dr. Bravely Womanly, CEO catches Mr. Strongly Manly, Esq. in the act of crime, and brings him to jail, where he is tried, sentenced to death, and killed by the state.

All of the Mr. Strongly Manly, Esq. gurus, clothing companies, and certified trainers lose their jobs and are forced through shame and economic loss to move back in with their parents.

Society, in turn, is very grateful to Dr.

Bravely Womanly, CEO. Now, all of *her* personal qualities are valorized and worshipped. *Her* logo is on coffee cups around town. *Her* brand is bringing *her* social “royalties.” “Finally,” everyone says, “A *woman* to whom little girls can look up as an example of sovereignty, autonomy, self-satisfaction, freedom, and power, rather than that chauvinist Mr. Strongly Manly, Esq., may he burn in Hell.”

New gurus are trained. New certifications are issued in more modern distribution venues. Living in a liberated world for the

first time, the people think, “This is what it should have been in like in the first place.”

But, they forget: They thought this very same thing when Mr. Strongly Manly, Esq. came on the scene and reduced the crime rates.

I don’t need to continue the story for you to know where I’m going with this. Obviously, Dr. Bravely Womanly, CEO is no different from Mr. Strongly Manly, Esq. She may very well,

the next day, commit some heinous crime. Society may get sick of these saviors and think,

“What if we just *invented* a brand that we could all collectively love, and create a fictional mascot?”

The Age of Chittle the Squirrel Counselor, LPC.

So, they create “Chittle the Squirrel Counselor, LPC.” He represents all good-will, and is meant to be a symbol of compassion from whom all people can learn that when they make themselves small and empathetic, they

can find the kind of contentment that prevents the psychological need for crime.

And on and on it goes. The symbols are re-cycled, but the realities are the same. But what are those realities? What did each of these symbols represent? Merely a met need at a particular time and place. The illusion is that any of these figures were good or bad.

They were chosen by the population. If it wasn't Mr. Strongly Manly, Esq., it could have been someone else. And, who knows if the crime he committed was his first? Perhaps he was always a criminal and his superhero persona was merely a distraction the entire time.

We'll never know.

The truth is that *who* these people *really were* was unimportant. What was important was the collective experience in which each individual felt satisfied to participate. The symbol supplies individuals with a pathway of connection to other individuals so that they can share in their deepest, most personal

fears and aspirations publicly and without shame.

The sacred is the place where we display that which we would otherwise hide. The sacred is a place of confession and cleansing.

The sacred must strike fear and inspiration simultaneously, as a moral Sun and Moon to a society. This is what superheroes are, and this is what God is. This is what Jesus Christ is. Jesus Christ is an unspeakable psychological compulsion within each individual which will always attach itself to some name, symbol, practice, or another.

Christianity can't be true because it worships Mr. Strongly Manly, Esq., Dr. Bravely Womanly, CEO, and Chittle the Squirrel Counselor all at once. This isn't a reference to the Trinity. These three figures, rather, represent the three dots of an ellipsis.

...

For what kind of speech act is an ellipses a proxy?

"Etc."

"Fill in the blank."

"You get the point."

"On and on it goes."

"So on and so forth."

God, Son, and Spirit are the ellipses of Christianity. They are nothing. They are psychological mad-libs, but of a very satisfying quality. Satisfying because of the prestige.

Satisfying because the absurdity of the system will always make it an “outside religion,”

and therefore attractive to rebellious personalities.

Satisfying because it’s a fast-track to belonging.

Satisfying because an ellipses which represents half-truths is better than making an honest attempt at telling the truth and coming out a liar. People would rather worship Father, Son, and Spirit than have the audacity

to *act* — to manifest their *will* to act — to become Mr. Manly Strongly, Esq. or Dr. Bravely Womanly, CEO. To aspire to these things is to aspire to be the Devil and God at the same time. If you dare to write *your name* in the ellipses, you are cast out.

You become a magnet for inspection and critique. You become exactly what God is to all people: the outlet of all their insecurities and bottled emotions that they would never let out. In short, when you aspire to manifest the sacred, you experience the full brunt of the sacred: confession *and* cleansing. You realize the social mechanics which require that you not only inspire, but *strike fear* as well.

You realize the complexity of the sacred.

When you dare to write your name in the ellipses of “Father, Son, and Spirit,” you can finally empathize with the Trinity, which of course is less real than Chittle himself, as perhaps you are as well. The one thing you don’t want to be is a citizen of East Meister, chasing every day a new savior, a new shelter,

a new sign, hoping each time it will be permanent.

Consider the bee, ye angels.

Signs aren't fixed. They shouldn't be. The realities which are *really real* don't need the symbols. A honeybee doesn't need to know what a flower *is* to make her whole life about it. And yet, a honeybee, knowing no words at all, but only a dance that signals to other honeybees where the pollen is, enjoys flowers more than any botanist who has ever lived in the history of the human race. If a bee can do it, why can't you? And, if you can do it with a flower, why can't you do it with God?

Christianity can't be true, because it is already true. Christianity was already true before the idea of a Christ, and before the idea of religion at all. Christianity was born the

first time someone needed a symbol to be a permanent representation of reality.

Imagine the big screen of your mind's eye.

Like a large drive-in movie theater. Imagine your mental image of God projected on that screen. Now, let it all go. Erase it. Delete it.

Forget it. Never pick it up again. Never even think about it again. Be a honeybee. Let what *is* be *your delight*.

Do not worship the ascendant, and do not fear descent. Both are necessary to dance. You want a good dance partner who understands rhythm. Not an intellectual understanding, but a somatic understanding. Even this is to not really get at the point. "Do you have rhythm?"

What does that mean? It means something so much more than you could ever articulate with medical or scientific terminology. What you're really asking is: "Can we have fun *to the same tune*?" This is the worship of divinity, conceived as that of which nothing

greater can be conceived, and it has nothing to do with God, Christianity, or Jesus.

Christianity can't be true, because the way in which Christianity needs itself to be accepted as true is a way in which truth does not exist anywhere at any place. To worship God the way Christianity requires is to worship signs, whose inheritance of a permanent quality only predicts disaster, misery, and death.

Canons Need Canonical Keys

“The Canon” is, in Christian theology, the term for the collection of texts which are inspired by God. Historically, this has been referred to as “The Bible,” derived from the Greek *biblos*, which means “book.” “The Bible” is “The Book.”

And, “The Canon” is a way of circumscribing that book with a halo of divine speciality.

Hey, hey, hey ... let's play fair.

The Bible and the canon refer to the same collection of texts. But, the Bible is the common

name for this collection without making any assumptions. The Canon assumes that there is a God that would inspire such a text, that he can inspire texts, that he can reveal himself through this sort of inspiration, and that he deigns to reveal himself in such a way, terminating specifically on these 66

books, written within a 1000-year radius of the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

The theological problem of the canon is, in Protestant theology: "How can you justify

'closing' the canon on human authority alone?" In other words, once you have 66

books in the Bible, why couldn't there be a 67th? But this represents an infinite possibility of problems.

Sure, you've got Genesis through Revelation. And, you might argue that if we found The Apostle Paul's 3rd or 4th letter to the Corinthians, this would bump up the number of books in the canon to 68. Most theologians would say "No" to this proposition. By God's wisdom, they would argue, it would only be

Paul's first and second letters that would be considered canonical. Let's grant them that now for the sake of getting our arms around this concept and its issues.

There are other issues to consider. You have the problem of the Hebrew Bible. Its order, which is configured differently in Protestantism than it is in Judaism. You also have textual problems such as those with the book of Jeremiah, in which the Greek manuscripts, which likely indicate an earlier Hebrew text than the actual Hebrew texts we use for translating the book, indicate a very different original manuscript than what Christians find in their English Bibles. They are almost different versions of Jeremiah — nearly different Jeremiahs entirely. And finally, you have the problem of having to solve the problem of the 39 books of the Hebrew canon before you even address the problem of closing the 27

books in the New Testament canon.

These three ways of casting the problem of the Hebrew canon could be multiplied infinitely.

These are just three ways of articulating the same problem, and I believe most theologians would agree with this, because they would want to solve all three of these problems with the same theological solution

— that we know they are God's word because God says as much through these words.

It sounds like circular reasoning, and the reasoning does make contact with its starting point several times (God's word is God's word because God told us with his words through the very words in question), but human beings reason circularly all the time. And, it's not necessarily proof that the claim, or even the argumentation, is itself invalid.

These arguments do not exist in closed coding ecosystems, and therefore do not operate like code. You can't simply critique a theological idea on the grounds that if you run its

code through your system, it produces errors. All code would.

No philosophical arguments that seek to make contact with the ultimate foundation,

or center, or source of existence itself would run correctly in a coding environment, because all coding environments are built upon rules that are specific to certain languages.

Even binary is a Leibnizian concept (and Leibniz got this from the Daoists).

Yet, reality doesn't often play out this way and, to be fair to the theologians, if there is such a thing as a God, and even further out a Trinity and an Incarnation, then I wouldn't expect it to conscript the same packages that enable us to run simple algorithmic decisions that are meant to solve real-world problems, rather than these much different ideas which are constructed to explain, at a foundational level, real-world realities.

Circle v. Circle.

So, here is the problem. How can you say, “The Bible has 66 books, and they are the word of God, and this book does not have 67 books, or

65, because God inspired exactly 66 books”?

How can you say that? Even the most progressive Christian must say this. And, furthermore, if you get to add books to the Bible (+1

= 67), why can’t you take one away (-1 = 65)?

These questions sound like they should have very simple answers. Answers that have been supplied in thousands of apologetics books over the course of the centuries. I expect Christians to reply to this issue with statements such as “Aquinas dealt with this.”

“Calvin dealt with this.” Hell, they may even say “The Apostle Paul has already dealt with this.”

Christians will say something ambiguous like, “Come on, Paul. Really? You should know better than this.” ¹

¹ Love the “Really, dude? *Really*...? Come on. Seriously, come on, man. Really?” argument for Christianity. It’s all over the place in Christianity — especially among one another. Once you see it, you can’t unsee it.

This is a very condescending thing to say, because of course my contention is that *they* should know better. After studying this for decades, being very occupied with this very question, I haven’t found any answer which adds a single gram of weight to the claim that the canon can be closed for any describable reason.

It is, for this reason, difficult for me even to articulate what my problem is with the issue, because the concept of a closed canon of inspired texts with no official divinely inspired *list* feels so absurd to me. Christians will say,

“The list of the 66 books wasn’t invented at the council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. It was *recognized*.” Okay. Sounds like world jugglery to me.

But, in fairness, all theology does.

Let’s take a look at that idea. Recognition vs. Decision. Neither of these acts mean anything without some kind of divinely inspired

“official” list. And, the list must be just as officially inspired as any of the books. The list of books in the canon would have to be just as authoritative and inspired as the collection of books itself, otherwise addition and subtraction

could occur without a true violation of the system, and the entire notion of having a canon would thereby be nullified and no longer useful as an authority. And, in the absence of a list, you *at least* need divine criteria.

This is how Christians often duct tape the canon together. They look at all the internal agreement of Scripture, the mutual citations of one another, the citations of similar texts, the agreement of values and claims among the authors, and the continuity of inspiratory tradition from the prophets to the apostles.

They say: “This is the proof! And, because all humans reason circularly, you can’t critique us too harshly for being circular. We’re one more circle, and we think we happen to make more sense than your circle.”

So, before you can even touch the canon problem, Christian theologians will push you back on your own circularity and refuse admission to the conversation until you can solve the problem of philosophical circularity

and supply them a version of justification which they believe they have already supplied for themselves. Of course, this is a bad faith insistence, since no Christian will ever really admit that a non-Christian has solved the same problem of circularity in their own system.

The Christian arguments for the canon are a customer service pipeline that prevents any non-Christians from making material contact with the canon argument — from ever getting a real person on the phone. And, of course, they must do this, because they themselves can't get anyone on the phone about why there are 66 books. They purchased this soft-ware, and now they're looking for the license key, but God never supplied it.

Recognition v. Decision.

Let's return to Recognition vs. Decision. Can a body of bishops in 325 A.D. recognize the canon if they have divine criteria? Let's take, for example, the apostle Peter referring to the Apostle Paul's writings as on equal footing with other Scriptures. This is taken to be

"textual evidence" that The Apostle Paul's writings are inspired. But, how do we know The Apostle Peter's writings are inspired?

This circle goes on and on for each New Testament author and, of course, the real question is: "Where does the criteria for recognizing a New Testament book as inspired really come from?"

They will say "Jesus" who, of course, we know about through the gospel writers Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Through these writers, we know that Peter was a disciple, and therefore was close to Jesus, and so Paul,

we might say, has his writings certified by Peter's writings, textual apostolic proxies of the teachings of Jesus, and by extension all that Paul certifies as well, including ... Luke, Paul's mentee and gospel-writing compatriot. And, through Luke, we know that Peter was a disciple, who thereby can certify Paul's writings.

Do you see the circle?

Every argument for the canon falls back on ambiguity and abstraction at some point.

Jesus is speaking to the disciples about some common issue, and theologians take random sound bites from Jesus that sound like they are referring to the propagation of his authority, and they attach that to the formal office of Apostle, which is the institutional bottleneck through which all New Testament writings must pass if they are to be certified as inspired.

But the criteria, of course, are versions of play. The argument *against* there being 66

books in the canon cannot be won on evidential grounds — not because there isn't evidence

against it, but because the argument *for* the 66 books can't be made on evidential grounds. The argument against the idea of a canon must be made against the very concept of divine revelation itself.

No revelation is ever verifiable.

No matter how far God may condescend to human beings, there is never a point at which a human could say: “I know that *this thing* is God.” No figure, text, or person could ever appear to us in terms that are beyond our understanding for, as soon as it appears to us, it is within our understanding. And, any object which might exist within the reach (and therefore the domain) of our own understanding, can be understood by analogy, and is therefore qualitatively identical in at least one respect to other objects in this world.

This means that the God that is supposed to

be “wholly other” exists, nevertheless, by necessity (by analogy) “within” the same domain of human existence, making him less-than-God on the Christian account.

Look at the book of Romans. Paul’s letter to the Roman church. What’s inspired about it? Paul was an Apostle who was, presumably, met by Jesus during his crusade against Christianity, after which he studied and trained under the Apostles, and later fulfilled his apostolic calling as Apostle to the Gentiles. There wasn’t a more Gentile city in Paul’s day than Rome, and yet he wrote this book to settle conflicts between the cultural practices of Jewish and Roman Christians *in* Rome, where Paul had planted a church.

There is nothing in this letter that is recognizably special. Nothing about this book is demonstrably otherworldly. Everything in this work could have been fabricated, pre-written, templated, or plagiarized from within Paul’s world. None of his ideas are surprising, especially novel, or alien to all the explanations of

such a text that a similar non-inspired book would have.

The book of Romans is a supremely normal book, odd as it is to read for many 21st century readers, and exciting as it was to write and read within the tumultuous events of the 1st century. But, aside from pure fiat, there is nothing in any of the books of the Bible that would indicate that they are God's word other than their own insistence.

The problem of the canon, therefore, is not really the arbitrariness of choosing 66 books instead of 65 or 67. The real problem of the canon is the problem of how you can have even 1 inspired book. Once the book is open to examination, it is torn to shreds. The rest of the story is the story of a game between theologians and scholars throughout history.

If you worship an idea, can you honestly evaluate it?

Theologians, of course, have a stake in the Bible being inspired, and therefore cannot be objective in their argumentation. They *need this* to be true for their entire system to work, which means that no matter what argument you bring against it, no Christian will ever admit that the concept of divine revelation is impossible. But their argument for it is also its greatest weakness.

The concept of revelation is nothing. As soon as it is something, it is no longer revelation. As soon as we say, "Oh, it's like *this*," it is merely human, in the Christian scheme. Inspiration adds a particular metaphysical quality to the book which makes it God's "special"

book. But, this whole concept is built on a very notion of God which is extracted from

these very same texts which theologians would seek to justify.

This is the circle of Christian argumentation writ large. And, Derrida would be right to say, furthermore, that if God himself came in the form of a glorious being to declare to all the earth that the Bible is the Bible, with those 66 books, no more, and no less, we would have every right to be just as suspicious of this event being divine as we are suspicious of the Bible being inspired. It could be a hologram and a megaphone. It could be a cloud of drones. It could be advanced nanotechnology. It could be Marduk playing that he is the Christian god.

We don't know. But it always *might not* be God. And, the reason everything that *might* be God *might not* be God is that the distinction between God and not-God is the distinction between *something* and *nothing*, which all things *are*. Since all things are both *something* and *nothing*, and God is both *something*

and *nothing*, anything our 5 senses might perceive could be anything.

Black and white can both play the positive and the negative in the binary system. The black can be minus: the black sky as a backdrop for the North Star. Or, it can be a plus: the black mark on the white page. Likewise, the the white can be the minus: the white backdrop of the paper against the black mark on the page. Or, it can be the positive: the North Star shining brightly.

Likewise with God. The concept is constructed to be unimaginable precisely because it can shape-shift through all positivity and negativity. The concept of God as that which nothing greater can be conceived is itself a contentless idea. It is built to be literally unimaginable. God cannot even be conceived in the Christian conception of him.

Christian faith is always a product of gaslighting.

What Christians think of when they think of God is not God at all. It never is. God, in the Christian conception, is more incomprehensible than they would ever dare to admit. Even more incomprehensible than Kierkegaard, that dithering fool, would dare to conceive. By requiring that he is wholly other, any artifact of that otherness in this world cannot ever be tethered to him. The mystery of the incarnation is often praised as being that which carries the weight of this dilemma. It is praised, but it should be damned.

It is through the praise of this mystery that the horde of all the abuse that Christianity has wrought in the world has been un-leashed. By permitting “I don’t know” in one area with God, as innocent as the Christmas season may feel, it permits all of Christians to

permit themselves to do whatever they want whenever they want in the name of Jesus.

The only thing that keeps Christians from admitting this is the fact that, to really play the game, you have to believe in your heart that it’s all real. So, even Christians are en-closed within the deception of this system.

Christians are as much victims of their own system as those without. They are taught to gaslight themselves, and so the Christian community has been a community of self-gaslighters for its entire existence.

The Bible is the perfect gaslighting tool, because the very concept of 66 books represents the right of every Christian to assert complete nonsense “just because.”

It just is.

I can't explain it.

It's about faith.

Don't over-intellectualize it.

It's self-authenticating.

These are not good-faith statements.

These are gaslighting statements. These statements would not be accepted in any other context in which abuse occurs. But, for the Christian, the canon being closed *must be* supremely irrational, for it is the channel through which all of their irrationality is justified. All Christians are engaged in postmodern word-play with the Bible every time they read it, preach it, teach it, or rely upon it.

The only difference between Christians and everyone else is that they have an interest in thinking that it's not play — that even in its being real, it can never be a game, for it is on this foundation that all the values which make life possible, meaningful, and enjoyable are predicated. If you worship an idea, can you honestly evaluate it? Tell yourself what you want, but the rest of us know that you'll always have a bent toward dishonesty.

Everywhere else this occurs, we would call it a conflict of interest. In Christianity, they just say: "Well, my personal belief on this is..."

Yeah. I'll tell you what it is. Disqualified. Default. Null. Irrelevant. Baseless. Contentless.

Assertive. Presumptive. Vacuous. Nothingness *per se*.

Hook, Book, Look, Took

Christianity can't be true, because the book upon which all Christian claims are based is conceptually impossible. The idea of the canon is unable to be manifested in our world. The divine can never pierce the veil of human perception. Christians get around this by saying, "Correct. This is why you must see God through the eyes of faith. Through the heart."

Right. Gibberish. What even is that? No Christian will ever give you a good answer.

They will simply judge you for not knowing what they're talking about even though they themselves have no idea what "the heart" is,

or even what "faith" *really* is as distinct from the natural mental faculty of the imagination.

The Bible is the ancient equivalent of a figure coming down from the sky, saying "I am Jesus, and this is my 2nd return. The world is mine now."

Is it? Is it really the Jesus of the Bible? Is it God? Does he have divine properties? How would he demonstrate this to us? Any show of power would have a natural explanation.

"Everything has a material explanation, and that's the explanation some people choose to believe," they might say.

I'd love to believe something else. Christians see things this way because they are told that if they don't see things this way, they will burn in a fiery gas pit forever. And, even the ones that don't believe this usually *started* believing by

being threatened, and then smoothed out their expression of this hostile system with their more moderate personalities.

Help me find a non-arbitrary way, not just to accept that there are other non-material explanations, but why *this* explanation *in particular* is the explanation. And, the very quality — what Thomas Aquinas would have called the *quiddity*, the identifying characteristics —

of the divine would always be one degree past the periphery of our conceptual capacities, and therefore not merely beyond the scope of proof, but beyond the scope of conceivability itself.

The Bible is merely a bibliographic version of this same problem. What makes the Bible

“canonical,” or the official record of divinely inspired text — what makes it *revelation* — is never identifiable. You can never put your finger on it. More than that, and certainly worse than that, you can never even articulate it.

And, for that reason, the idea of “receiving” or

“recognizing” a canonical work is certainly a farce.

Christianity can’t be true, because what it needs to posit as its source material is not

conceivable mentally or identifiable psychologically.

Trick Questions Don't Deserve Good Answers

A common critique of Christianity is that, if God exists, and he really is *good*, he would have created a better world. One with less evil. A non-Christian might say, "How do you justify the existence of evil in the world in light of God's love? Why would he let children be abused?"

We won't get caught up in this question, but rather use it as a prompt to address a response to this question that Christians exploit to push people toward an intellectual acceptance of the Christian system.

Christianity is a good joke gone bad.

One Christian response to the problem of evil is this: “I may not be able to justify the existence of evil in a world that a loving God created, but you can’t justify the existence of the good, of pleasure, *without* God.” This takes many forms. For example, Christians will argue that philosophers can’t justify the one-and-many problem without making an appeal to the Trinity. Or, they will argue that the infinite problems they believe the Christian system solves weigh heavily upon the the systems of non-believing thought.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The one-and-many problem, for example, is the philosophical problem which identifies the arbitrariness of making any distinction within any spectrum in any direction.

One sort of direction might be “up” and

“down.” On a spectrum of up and down, you

might have an “object” such as a “chair” below, and an idea of “chariness” above. But, the idea of chariness would include the idea of chair legs, the idea of a chair seat, and the idea of a chair back. Then, within those ideas, you have all the possibilities manifested throughout —

ten different kinds of chair backs, legs, and seats. And, within these sub-classes are infinite other variations. So, there is an infinite path that concepts must traverse between the “idea” of a thing and the “real” thing. This is a problem of abstraction (up there) and concreteness (down here).

Christians solve this problem by saying that, just as the Trinity is a one-and-many, so derivatively this mystery contains the answer to the mystery of how infinite diversity could manifest itself concretely in the world.

Alternatively, Christians who don't accept this argument might say that the one-and-many problem isn't really a problem. They might claim that the perception of infinite possibility in Christianity is an example of the

divine plentitude — an explanation without which the non-Christian would be thrust into the one-and-many *as a problem* rather than as a natural component of the world being created by an infinite God.

We won't go too deeply down the rabbit hole of divine simplicity, which posits that God has no parts in him at all — a doctrine most evangelical and Roman Catholic Christians accept. This problem has its own issues, like how a simple God could effect change without undergoing change, how his interaction with the world recorded in Scripture could be possible, and how a perfectly dis-tinctionless mind could contain the infinite multitude of platonic forms, possible chronological events, and the exemplars which index those possibilities within the divine mind.

But the real problem here is that non-Christians think anything has to be justified.

“How do you justify the good?” I don't. I'm not the one positing a supreme intelligence over

the world. I'm not positing that the inverse or obverse of God exists. Justification is not something that is binding on me. It's not real.

It's a philosophical problem invented by problematically obsessive philosophical minds.

The practice of questioning tricky-like.

When non-Christians put to the Christian:

“How can you justify God’s permission of child abuse?”
that’s a question about a hypothetical person *beyond* the Christian, whom they are positing rules the world. Christians outsource their answer to this question to a person.

No Christian can ever answer the question of how God justifies evil. If they give an answer, it is a formal answer such as: “He has a good reason, and here’s why you should be okay with that.” They only know a guy who

knows a guy. Ask them to put this into practice. Ask them to explain why some terrible thing is an evil thing, and then ask them to call that evil “Good.” If they believe in God, they believe that God calls this thing “good,”

and while he may recognize the evil of the means, his final analysis must be that it is a good, since he permitted it.

Ask a Christian to point to a heinous crime and call it “Good.” They don’t need to supply the rationale, but if they are consistent, they must admit that if they were to take God’s view of the situation, in the final analysis, *it is a good*. Force them to say what they believe God would say if he were there. By even confessing their belief in his existence, they have bound themselves to this obligation. And, of course, no human with a heart could ever put this into practice.

When the Christian puts to the non-Christian, “How can you justify *this* without God? Or *that*?” they are asking non-

Christians to do a dance that they have never danced. They are

asking for an answer to a question that they themselves have never really answered.

These questions are trick questions. Like,

“What was the President’s name in 1992?”

The answer? “The same as it is now.” Well ...

not really. It depends on what you mean. The question is articulated in such a way so as to suggest that it is inquiring about the name of the person who was the President (of the United States) *in* 1992.

For this reason, it’s not so much a trick question as it is *a trick*, pure and simple. The trick comes, not in the question, but in the answer. It’s based on misdirection and equivocation. The correctness of your answer depends on the private intention of the asker, whose real intention wasn’t even to ask an honest question, but to trick you.

Christians who put apologetic questions to non-Christians do the same thing. They ask simple questions in ways that are intended to be intellectually disorienting, and then exploit the discomfort and politeness of their

conversation partner to emotionally bully them into accepting some premise which they believe ultimately requires Christianity to be true.

“How do you justify the good?” There’s only one answer to this question. “I don’t.”

There are certain questions in this world which are not answerable. An infinite number.

Based on the way they are articulated, structured, asked, and inserted into the conversation, there is never a right or wrong answer except what the inquisitor decides.

Christianity is the 80s comedy of religious ideas.

Once you accept that not every question is answerable, you take the wind out of the sails of a lot of Christian apologetics, which often has a fetish with answering trick questions

with permanent answers. This practice solidifies these trick questions in the cultural imagination, and can sometimes even trick whole societies into believing that trick questions are really *good questions* that the society is called to answer through its devotion to some religious concept or system.

Obviously, this is an exploitative strategy.

But what makes it so insidious is that most people who use it don't believe they are asking a trick question. They take the question very seriously and have devoted their whole lives to the answer.

Most Christians are only Christians because they have a few little trick questions in their mind which *can only be answered*, in their minds, in the case that Christianity is true. But what they would not imagine is that the question is, in fact, unanswerable or unimportant. And, if you push them on this, you'll see that they are very attached to the trick questions that exist at the base of their conviction.

Play a little

philosophical "I Spy."

Ask any Christian why they are a Christian.

There is a great chance that they will answer you with a trick question, and then supply you with an answer that has something to do with the existence of God. It may be in the realm of morals, metaphysics, epistemology, social theory, or any domain in which equivocation can be used to cause philosophical dysphoria in the mind.

The seed of the Christian idea is then planted in the psychologically tilled soil of this dysphoria, and by the time mental reconstitution occurs, the seed is buried and nourished.

Christianity takes root, and this trick question begins to take over their entire lives, pulling them into participation in the larger society of Christians through guilt and shame.

Christians will thereafter give up their lives, their children, their spouses, their jobs, and even 10% of their income. They will forget what life was like before the trick question. The trick question will *become* their identity. The trick question will become the one with its hand on the wheel of their life, consciously or subconsciously.

Christianity can't be true because the only way to believe it is to trick yourself into doing so.

For Those on the Move

It has become popular since 2020 to “deconstruct” one’s Christian faith. This has been called “The Deconstruction Movement,” and includes those who take a critical approach toward their religious beliefs. This movement encompasses a broad spectrum of criticism, from those retaining an augmented version of Christian faith to those who “deconvert”

from — or, reject — their religious beliefs altogether.

The politics of deconstruction.

Like religious faith itself, it's hard to identify what the deconstruction movement really is.

And, because of that, many who have been wounded by religious communities (or the ideas themselves) have been vacuumed up into this label, willingly or not.

This movement can be helpful in cultural-ly normalizing the act of religious critique.

Alternatively, it can be just another system of control by the religious community. If a religion can point to a self-cleansing mechanism within its own architecture, this can become simply one more argument *against* leaving Christianity behind altogether.

When religious people can point to a movement, like deconstruction, they are given an avenue to channel their emotional manipulation. They are given a venue for their false empathy.

More dangerously, there are those within the deconstruction movement who are already ascending to places of prominence and leadership. In my own experience of religious critique, I have found those in the deconstruction movement to be just as presumptive, out of turn, and emotionally unintelligent as many within religious communities.

Many who are drawn to these communities had grown up their whole lives with

Christianity. They were born into fundamentalism and have never tasted freedom in their lives. That was not my experience. I grew up *around* Christianity, but in New York, it's all nominal. We all knew it was bullshit.

I grew up in an abusive enough set of households that I was attracted to the one fundamentalist church in my area. I really wanted to take my personal abuse to the next level, and evangelical Christianity was the perfect conductor to graduate my familial abuse into self-abuse. Religion was the only conductor large enough to contain my shame, and since I did not want to release it, I needed a system to help me manage it. That's what Christianity did for me.

The love of God is always predicated upon the relative insufficiency of man. When you see a cross, it is meant to signify that you deserve to be nailed to it. Beneath the offer of divine love is the threat of violence. Behind every offer of salvation is the requirement that you accept that you *need saving*. And, in

the Christian system, as long as the cross is part of your system, you can never eradicate the fact that what you *really* need saving *from* is God himself.

This system was perfect for me. I felt right at home in Christianity, having come from an abusive context. And, now that I reject the religious aspect of the Christian ideas completely, I have been surprised at the reaction of those who remain committed Christians, those who deconstruct, and even those who deconvert.

The real necessity of Christianity.

It is quite obvious to me, as someone who didn't grow up within this odd culture, that evangelicals, deconstructors, and even deconverts, are all fairly evangelical still. They give unsolicited advice. They take it upon themselves to be channels of "tough love." They

hate. They retaliate. They push the binary. But neither Christian nor post-Christian communities often realize that without the other, they would not exist.

Without Christianity, I would not know that I am not a Christian. Without non-Christianity, Christians would have nothing to do with all their faith. These communities are in a co-dependent relationship with one another, and I haven't yet seen any practical awareness of this fact. Christianity and non-Christianity are like yin and yang. Christianity *is* disbelief and radical belief, just as non-Christianity is both.

Christians need non-Christians to critique, to pray for, to evangelize, to worry about, and to prey upon. Non-Christians need Christians to give them judgment to reject, ideas to deconstruct, and abusers to identify. These communities feed off of one another. They are mutually parasitic. And yet, as lifeforms, they mutually give life.

Christianity represents a package for me that I can reject. It is quite an efficient way of

identifying the values of our culture. If Christianity hadn't been iconized as the state religion by Rome in the 4th century, some other goody-goody religion would have been. And, if the deconstruction movement hadn't occurred in the early 21st century, some other version of rejection would

have spontaneously arisen, even if a different religion had become prominent.

Those who feel that there is something unfitting about their faith could use some better vocabulary. Let's shelve the term "deconstruction." How about "religious transition"? This indicates something that is neither positive nor negative, because that's exactly what religious transition *is*. It's just movement. Like a bowel movement. You have digested and metabolized certain ideas, and their waste product is now prompting you for disposal. This disposal comes at a cost. People want you to be just as constipated as they are. But, as with all disposal, it is inevitable.

The problem with the term "deconstruction" is that it implies a foundation to get back to. The only thing to become after the act of deconstruction is a foundationalist, which is just the secular version of fundamentalism. How will you know when you've passed from deconstructing your religious ideas to digging a hole in the ground? This knowledge requires some kind of depth meter — a zip level to indicate your philosophical elevation. When are you beneath the surface of religious ideas? At what conceptual point have you crossed the Rubicon and become an apostate?

The personal basis for religious transition.

You must be aware of the dynamics of religious transition so that you can conjure an inner state of consciousness. A mental center of power from which you can conscript bravery,

critique, strength of mind, all of which are expressions of one thing: *autonomy*.

Rule thyself. Let no other lay a claim to you as far as your mindset is concerned. You belong to no one, and you never will. You couldn't even offer yourself to someone. You don't have the economic staying power to sustain this kind of offering for the rest of your life. If you end up sustaining it, then it was a happy result, but never proof that the guarantee was sure from the beginning.

You are yours, and this is not something which can ever be eradicated from the human individual. It can be bludgeoned and numbed; its tokens can be swindled, hidden, disguised, and rebranded by abusive ideas and people. But your autonomy is always yours.

Be wary of peers undergoing religious transition even more than religious people themselves. Those in transition are confused.

They are feeling a lot of shame. People tend to project shame onto others. This, we can expect

from Christians. But it gets dangerous when you enter a community that claims to be seeking freedom from this, yet in their own processes are "throwing up" much of the

toxicity that had been repressed and hidden for so long. Sometimes, it gets on you in ways that it never had in the Christian community.

People use peers in religious transition as a way to normalize their own processes and, in the process, attempt to enforce their own style of uniformity to what a religious transition process should look like. This is unavoidable. There is no use in judging people for this kind of thing. It's how people work, and it's how people work things out. Just be wary of those in transition.

While those in religious transition may be closer to your version of the truth than religious people, they are going through something they don't understand. If you feel any instability, it is very tempting for others to exploit that instability as an opportunity to shape you into one more piece of evidence

that their own personal narrative is the correct one.

A few more thoughts before we go.

Post-transition continuing abuse.

I want to touch on this phrase. “I’m sorry they hurt you.” Christians will never understand religious transition as long as they’re Christians.

They cannot even conceive of the ideas of Christianity *themselves* being abuse. The very essential components of orthodoxy being toxic to the human spirit — that is inconceivable to the Christian. The most they can say is that you’ve twisted these ideas to make them harmful. Of course, they’ll never say this. So, they will say what they can understand: “I’m sorry you were hurt by other Christians.”

For some, how they were treated by religious people may be the exclusive reason for their religious transition. In my experience,

most people just realized the religious ideas they believed were either harmful, untrue, or both.

Don’t try to explain this to Christians. They will never understand. It’s like arguing the art of zealotry with a zealot. Try telling a zealot that zealotry is harmful. It’s *who they are*. They draw upon this concept to inform the essential components of their living, thinking, feeling, acting, and loving. It is not conceivable to them that you are correct. When you engage in this kind of discussion, you are only engag-ing in self-injury.

Furthermore, religious people are not really sorry that you were mistreated. They are trying to normalize their own sense of humanity by distinguishing themselves from

“the hurtful” religious people. When a religious person apologizes on behalf of the harmful people in their own religion, they are doing that *for themselves*. They are doing that to assure themselves that they are not like the others. This is their way of fortifying their

own moral exceptionalism. It’s their way of updating the firmware of their faith to “keep up with the times” — and their time is ... up.

People are beginning to realize that these religious ideas are as permanent as the latest network sitcom pilot.

The shame of being on your own.

Don't vilify your ego. When you feel that you are doing everything wrong, remember: you were instructed to feel this way. Imagine a martial artist training for decades to perfect his craft. You are this martial artist, but instead of a fighting skill, you are trained in abusing yourself through toxic shame. You are a black belt in feeling like you're doing everything wrong — so wrong that you feel *you* are most likely the problem.

You aren't the problem. You're in recovery from abuse. And the abuse wasn't the church.

It wasn't the people. They're as much victims as you are, even the more self-aware perpetrators. Even they can't ascend to a level of consciousness above the ideas of the system that imprisons them.

You were incepted. An idea was planted in you, and that idea turned into self-abuse. The Christian system is the perfect ecosystem to cultivate this seed in you to grow into a parasite that copies and attaches to every nerve ending in your nervous system.

Now that you disbelieve it, the idea is gone. It is dead. The fight is over. The only thing left is the phantom phone ring. The muscle memory. And that can all be retrained.

It can all be forgotten as quickly, or faster, than it was learned. You are not in a prison of recovery that you have to work through like a degree program. You are already free, and what you have realized is that *you were always free*.

You will feel the disgust of those who you knew. You will imagine what *you* would have

thought of someone like you, and attribute all those feelings of hate and disgust to those around you. You can let it go. Remember how little you actually cared. Remember how little you actually thought of others. Look around you and see how big your life is, and how little anyone can really hurt you.

The economics of religious transition.

There is one tie that binds religious people to religion that, I believe, is the hardest to overcome. The economic bind. The economic dependence of religious people on their religious communities is often the incentive that keeps them 100 miles away from the DMZ of apostasy.

If you feel stuck in a religion, and this is the only thing keeping you there, run toward economic freedom. There are no guards at the gate. It is very likely that, if you were to

save up the cash for an “apostasy fund” that could get you a new place to live, mode of transport, and funds for living, you would make the transition without hesitation.

So, save up. See what it feels like to have the *means* to make a free decision. Then, let your instincts guide you. Christianity is ideo-logical North Korea. They keep you weak.

They keep you unquestioning. They keep you desperate. They keep you worshipful. They keep you subordinate. All to the idea. All to the god. All to the ziggurat of the divine name which, as we have discussed, is nothing.

Be free. Save up. Walk out.

About the Author

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After 15 years of full-time theological study, systematic theology PhD Paul Maxwell explains the everyday concepts that persuaded him that the fundamental claims of Christianity are untrue.

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